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A Christian Coping with Grief



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In his discussion of coping with grief, Steve Gregg, a Christian author and speaker, emphasizes that grieving is a natural and legitimate response to the loss of a loved one. He draws examples from the Biblical stories of Lazarus, Abraham, and Job to illustrate that even people of faith can struggle through difficult times. Gregg suggests that showing love to God and surrendering to His will can provide comfort and strength during times of grief, as can focusing on the hope of resurrection and the nearness of God. Ultimately, Gregg highlights the importance of trusting in God's mercy and grace to endure hardship and loss.

Transcript

It's good to see how many of you braved the storm tonight. I guess it's going to be stormier tomorrow, from what I understand, so maybe you got here ahead of that. But still, some of you I've talked to have come some distance, and I appreciate that.

George, who opened the meeting with prayer tonight, also was the one who invited me to come here and secure these facilities. And he also asked if I would speak on this topic. In January, George lost his wife to cancer, and he thought it would be good if I could speak on the subject of grieving, especially as Christians.

Because the Bible does say that we do not grieve as others who have no hope. That doesn't mean we don't grieve. We do grieve, but we don't grieve like other people who don't have hope.

It would be valuable for us to explore what the Bible tells us about this. So tonight we're going to be talking about Christians and grieving. Now, when we talk about grieving, we're usually thinking about the loss of a loved one, usually to death.

I'm going to broaden that a little bit to include losing family to other crises, other disasters. I mean, you may have your family still alive, but have lost them nonetheless, for whatever reason. It's a very common thing now for young people to be alienated from their parents or alienated from God, and the parents are Christians, and there's this sense of loss there as well.

Primarily, I'll be talking about the grief that is experienced through the loss of a loved one to death. But I have actually experienced both kinds of grief. I've had a wife who was killed in an accident back in 1980.

Of course, it's been a long time now, and I'm trying to revisit those emotions and experiences too as I'm trying to relate with this topic. But I've also lost a 20-year marriage to the other cause. That is, I had a wife and children, and for 20 years she and I served the Lord together.

In fact, when I ran the school here in town, she was my wife. After we left town, actually, we moved to Idaho for a while, and she had a change in her mental condition, and she left the family, four kids at home, and so I ended up being single again and raising those four kids until they were mature. Unfortunately, they have not all followed the Lord, and that's a great grief to me as well.

In fact, some of them, because of their choices, are not really in touch with us, so there's that sense of loss too. I don't consider myself to have suffered extremely more than others, but at least I've suffered in more than one way and can relate with perhaps different ways that some of our listeners here have suffered and experienced bereavement or loss, the kind of thing that brings grief or mourning. I'm actually entitling this talk, Jesus Wept, and I don't think we even need to turn to the passage.

Everyone's familiar with the passage. In John chapter 11 and verse 35, we read that the shortest verse in the Bible is the words, Jesus wept. It's the only verse in the Bible that is only two words long, like that, and many people have thought, well, why did Jesus weep? And some people say, well, if you're not familiar, I assume most of you are, he wept at the tomb of his friend, his friend Lazarus, who had died a few days earlier and was buried there.

When Lazarus was still living and was still ill, his sisters had sent a message to Jesus, but Jesus was two days journey away, and when the message came to him, they said, you know, your friend Lazarus is sick and by implication, please come and, you know, do something about this. Jesus was the one person that these people knew who could actually do something about that, because Jesus could heal all kinds of sicknesses, but he didn't. He waited for Lazarus to die.

He waited two more days, and then he knew supernaturally. Jesus knew that Lazarus had died, and he said to his disciples, our friend Lazarus is sleeping. I'm going to wake him up, and the disciples said, well, if he's sleeping, he'll get better.

And Jesus said, well, he's actually dead. He says, I'm glad I wasn't there, because I want you to have occasion to believe. Apparently, Lazarus dying was going to create an opportunity for greater faith on the part of the disciples.

Then, if he had simply just healed another sick guy, healing the sick is pretty faith-inspiring until you've seen about 400 cases in a short period of time. Then it gets to be another one of those. It gets to be predictable.

Oh, there's a guy. I know it's going to happen. But when a guy dies, it's not so predictable.

Jesus didn't raise the dead all the time. He did raise other people, Jairus' daughter and the deceased only son of a widow in the town of Nain. So there were two children who had died, and he restored them to their parents.

But this was a case of a grown man whom Jesus restored to his sisters by raising him from the dead. But as he stood at the tomb before he raised him from the dead, it says Jesus wept. And the question is, well, why would he weep? He knew he was going to raise the guy from the dead.

I mean, what's so sad about that? And some people say, probably most preachers say, well, I think he was probably weeping because of the lack of faith of these people. He saw how they were grieved, and he wished that they were just more believing that he had things under control and that they shouldn't be weeping and so forth. However, they didn't really know, and there wasn't really much reason for them to know that Jesus was going to raise them from the dead.

Although Jesus had given them a hint, because when he was told that Lazarus was sick, he sent the message back to the sisters by the messenger. This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God. And yet Lazarus died, so it seemed like Jesus hadn't told the truth.

Well, actually, of course, we know from that story that death wasn't the final end, and the man ended up alive after all. So the sickness was not ultimately unto death, only temporarily. Ultimately, it was to the glory of God by the man being raised.

And when Jesus came down finally, and the man had been dead for four days, the sister said, Lord, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. And Jesus said, your brother's going to live again. And he said, well, we know in the resurrection.

And Jesus said, did I not say to you that if you will believe, you will see the glory of God? And that's when they went and saw the tomb. And that's when Jesus wept. Now, so some people think, well, Jesus was disappointed because these girls, these women didn't trust him, didn't believe him.

He said that this was not going to be unto death. It's going to be to the glory of God. And they just weren't, they just felt like it was too late.

So they didn't believe in him. But Jesus encountered many other cases of disbelief, far

more inexcusable than this one, even from his own disciples. And we don't find him weeping on those occasions.

I don't think he was weeping because of their lack of faith. I think he was weeping because his friend was dead. And we might say, well, why would he weep when his friend said he knows that he's going to raise him from the dead? Well, I presume he did know that he was going to raise him from the dead.

But he was still in the presence of the death of a loved one. And although he was going to raise this from one from the dead, I believe this situation just called to his attention that the tragedy and suffering of so many people like these friends of his who are here weeping at the tomb. And while he knew these people were going to have occasion to rejoice in a few minutes.

I believe just standing in the presence of death, something that he never really intended to exist in his creation. When Jesus. Acting on behalf of the father created the all things he didn't intend for there to be death.

I'm not saying he was surprised when it happened. I believe God knows all things future, but it was not in. It was not designed for that.

It was because of sin that death came and sin has ruined everything. And I think that that was graphically laid upon Christ's emotions as he stood there and saw his friends weeping his friend dead in the tomb. Regardless, what was going to happen to Lazarus? This this scene was multiplied millions of times over around the world.

In fact, it's a scene that everybody faces at some time. Everybody either loses loved ones. Or their loved ones lose them because everybody dies.

And unless they have no loved ones. Someone's gonna be mourning. Someone's gonna be grieving.

It's universal. And I think that that's what Jesus was weeping about. I think that he mourned the death even of this man who's going to be raised from the dead.

And that tells us something because when my my wife who was killed when she was killed. I was sad about that too, obviously. Though I knew she was gonna rise from the dead.

I'm a Christian. I know there's gonna be a resurrection of the dead. All the people who've ever followed Christ are gonna be raised from the dead.

Just like Lazarus was. Only more so. Because Lazarus, I presume, simply came back alive not in his glorified body.

On the resurrection of the last day, all Christians are gonna rise in glorified bodies,

immortal. And therefore, what we believe would seemingly disabuse us of sorrow and grieving in the death of our loved ones. Even more than we'd expect in the case of Jesus knowing that Lazarus is gonna rise right then.

But we weep anyway. And so did Jesus. Death is something to weep about.

In fact, throughout the scripture, it is assumed that death is the enemy of mankind. Now Paul said, of course, to live is Christ and to die is gain. And that is because Christ has come and defeated death.

But death is still an enemy to defeat. Death is not a friend to mankind. It is an enemy.

Paul said the last enemy to be destroyed will be death. And that would be at the resurrection when Jesus returns. That, in some respects, that enemy has been defeated at the cross.

But we still face it. We still lose loved ones. And we still experience the grieving that's part of it.

In the Old Testament, when they knew far less than we do about the resurrection and about eternal life, because those things weren't discussed in the Old Testament so much, we read commonly of mourning the dead as a normal response of godly people. For example, Abraham, in Genesis 23 and verse 2, when his wife Sarah died, it says he needed to buy a piece of property to bury her at. And it says in Genesis 23, 2, So Sarah died in Kirgith Arba, that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

Now this is a man of faith. He's a friend of God. In fact, as far as I know, apart from the disciples and us, he's the only man of God that's called the friend of God in Scripture.

And he's God's friend. God had appeared to him visibly. He had even required him at one point seemingly to kill his own son, which God prevented him from doing, but he thought he was going to have to do it.

He'd been through many tests, and he'd seen God's goodness and God's provision and so forth. Yet, when Sarah died, he wept. Why? Was he hopeless? No, he wasn't hopeless.

He was probably lonely, and it's a poignant thing. When you've spent most of your life with somebody, and now the rest of your life you're going to spend without them, on this earth anyway, that's a poignant and hard thing. It's something that is a legitimate thing to weep about and to mourn about.

So we find Abraham, God's friend, a man of faith, the great pillar of faith held out as an example of faith to all Christians in the New Testament. He is mourning and weeping at the loss of his wife. In Genesis 37, verses 34 and 35, we read that Joseph was believed to

be dead by his father.

You remember how his brothers had sold him into slavery and then deceived their father into thinking that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. And when Jacob learned the news and assumed Joseph was dead, it says in Genesis 37, verse 34, then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, the hypocrites.

They knew Joseph wasn't dead, but they weren't telling their dad. And so they tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, for I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.

Thus his father wept for him. If you've lost a loved one close to you, you really do think, I think I'm going to die now. I think I'm going to mourn myself to death because I can't think of much other reason to live.

The new normal without my wife, my husband, my child, it just is a, it'll never be normal. It'll never seem normal. Life as I become accustomed to it through my whole life.

And usually when you lose loved ones, you're considerably advanced in years yourself. So that you think, you know, the better, best years of my life were spent with this person. And now I've got the ragged end to spend to try to make do somehow without this person.

And, you know, I know for a fact when my deceased wife was killed, I never went back into the room where we had lived. We were actually renting a room at the time from, in a house with some Christians. I never went back into that room.

I just, I just couldn't bring myself to do it. It was too painful. But I think most people experience, they feel like, you know, I can't stand this.

This is too horrible. I'm going to die. On the other hand, God gave me tremendous grace in it.

So that I recovered much faster than most people thought I would. And I'll tell you something of that story eventually here. But when Jacob said, I'm going to go down to my death mourning for my son.

I can relate to that. If one of my children died today, I mean, the very thought of it seems unbearable. And it hasn't even happened.

In fact, I was, when my wife was killed, I remember thinking, I'm glad God didn't tell me yesterday that this was going to happen. Because I would have, I would have torn my hair out thinking, you know, I wouldn't be able to stand it. And yet when it happened, I was able to stand it.

It's amazing. You think you're going to die, but you're not. It's amazing what we can go through and actually come out on the other side, but he wouldn't be comforted by his sons.

You know, when you lose something like that, it's hard for anyone to comfort you because especially someone who hasn't gone through it. When my, when my wife was killed, actually, we were in a church in Santa Cruz, California, where one of our deacons had lost a wife quite young in an automobile accident. He'd been driving.

And there was an accident and his wife and she was pregnant, wife and child in her were killed. And this is, you know, I heard the story when I first came to the church, I remember thinking, oh, I don't know how a man could stand that, you know, going through that. And then my wife was killed.

And what's interesting, everyone in the church filed into my home to comfort me at some point in the next 24 hours after my wife died, but none of them really could do anything for me until he came in. I was able to be comforted by him because I knew he had been there too. It was a totally different experience when he showed up because I knew that he was feeling it again, too.

He'd been through it. It's hard when you've been through it, not to feel it again. I've been through a divorce also.

And I remember having gone through a divorce. I couldn't stand to hear that somebody else was going through a divorce. It was too painful for me, not, not painful because of my divorce particularly, but because I could relate to what they're going through.

I thought this is, you know, I've been through this. I hate to think of any other human being having to go through this. It's just, it just thinks, you just think pain and sorrow are the kind of thing that you just can't survive if it gets intense enough, but you can't, it's an amazing thing.

I mean, think of how many people endure torture and, you know, Vietnam prison of war camps and things like that, or Nazi prison of war camps like Corrie ten Boom, people like that. Or, or frankly, Richard Wurmbrandt, the Romanian pastor who was tortured in communist prisons in Romania for 14 years. And I mean, with constant torture, you think I couldn't endure that.

It's amazing that you can, and especially the Bible indicates that Christians have resources that make it a very transformed experience of when we have to go through something like that, which we're going to examine in some detail tonight. One other passage in Genesis chapter 50, this speaks about when Jacob died and Joseph was with him in Egypt and, and Joseph and Jacob had become very famous in Egypt because Jake, Joseph had saved Egypt from famine and was very much respected in the country. And

his father was venerated and so forth.

So we read in Genesis 50, when Jacob died in verse 30, 40 days were required for him. That is to prepare the body and the Egyptian custom for burial. And it says 40 days were required for him for such are the days required for those who are embalmed.

And the Egyptians mourned for him for 70 days. The whole nation mourned for Jacob for 70 days. That's a long time to process something with, with the bereaved.

I mean, I can see someone who loses their parent or their child or their spouse being grieved for more than 70 days, but for the whole nation to, to share in that grief, it just shows that the Bible recognizes it takes time to process that kind of a loss. And a Christian should not feel guilty if they're having a little bit of trouble with it from time to time. But the Bible does say we don't grieve as others who have no hope, which means there is an entirely different experience that the Christian normally should have in grieving.

That makes it an entirely different kind of experience because we have hope. And as I said, I'm going to talk about that, but I wanted, I'm going to punctuate this talk with some quotes from C.S. Lewis in his book, *A Grief Observed*. Many of you know who C.S. Lewis was.

He was an Oxford professor and also came, he taught alternate Oxford and Cambridge in England. He was Irish by birth. He was an atheist until his college years.

And then he became a convert to Christianity and he wrote many books as a Christian apologist defending the faith. Most people would suggest the best books of that kind were probably written by him. He's a tremendous author, but he didn't get married until he was quite late in life in his fifties.

And he met and fell in love with a woman, another writer from America. And she moved to England. They got married.

And after a few years of marriage and they were very much in love, she got cancer. And to make a long story short, she died. And he was just not really prepared for that.

And when he was going through the mourning process, he kept, he filled four notebooks with his sort of journaling his grief. And he didn't intend for it to be published, but later he approved of it being published. And it was published as a book called *A Grief Observed*.

And it's interesting because it's four notebooks. So it's four chapters. It's a short book.

And, and he's practically lost his faith in chapter one, or he's on the verge of losing his faith. By the end he's reached some resolution. And as you read through the book, you

see some of the things he's going through.

And I wanted to share some of the things he said, because I think his experience may have been perhaps even a little more normal than my own when I, when my wife was killed, because I, I felt the grace of God very, very powerfully carried me through it. So I never had the slightest challenge to my faith in the process. I mean, to me, I never really questioned God.

I felt like God has the right to do what he wants to do. This is not what I wanted him to do, but he, he's God and I'm not. And I just, to me, it never challenged my faith even a little bit, but I think that many Christians would be more like CS Lewis.

Now he's a strong believer, but, but when you go through this kind of thing, you say, why did God allow this? And, and he, you know, he did express himself better than many people would. And therefore, I want to read at certain points, some of the things he wrote in that book, short little book called a grief observed. And here he describes depression after she died that he was feeling.

And I think that I could definitely relate with this part because I think anyone could, who has lost a loved one. He said, there is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says, or perhaps hard to want to take it in.

It's so uninteresting. It is. It's not true that I'm always thinking of her work and conversation make that impossible, but the times when I'm not are perhaps my worst for then, though I have forgotten the reason there is spread over everything, a vague sense of wrongness of something amiss, like in those dreams where nothing terrible occurs, nothing that would sound even remarkable if you told it at breakfast time, but the atmosphere, the taste, the whole thing is deadly.

So with this, I see the rowanberries reddening, and I don't know for a moment why they of all things should be depressing. I hear a clock strike and some quality it always had before has gone out of the sound. What's wrong with the world to make it so flat, shabby, worn out, looking than I remember.

This is one of the things I'm afraid of. The agonies, the mad midnight moments must in the course of nature die away, but what will follow just this apathy, this dead flatness. Now that's how he's talking in the first chapter, but if you ever lose somebody that close to you, this is I think a very normal experience.

The whole world doesn't matter anymore because that person's, the loss of that person is such a, create such a vacuum that everything else that ever mattered before just doesn't seem to matter anymore because nothing weighs as much in our emotions as that person who is now lost. It caused you to reassess your priorities for sure. And suddenly the things you did that were once entertaining things you did, you know, light

conversations you had with people before that would, and people try to keep having with you.

They just aren't, they just seem shabby. They just seem uninteresting. They just seem like trivial.

Like why are we talking about anything? Don't you know the world ended here? Remember that, that old song in the sixties, don't they know it's the end of the world. It ended when I lost your love. Remember this old pop song? Why do the birds go on singing? So those kinds of things.

I don't remember the words to the song, but it's, and I couldn't relate to it in the sixties cause I was a preteen. But, but I, when I think of those words, I think I know what she's talking about. Don't these, don't the birds know it's the end of the world.

Why are they still singing? It's all over. There's nothing. I'll never be happy again.

There's nothing to be happy about. I mean, I can cope. I can survive.

I can drag myself through life a little more, maybe to the end. Okay. Maybe I'll even feel better about it someday, but it's just really, everything doesn't matter.

Now there's this, like you said, there's this invisible blanket between the rest of the world and me. Everything's so uninteresting. This apathy, this, this is obviously one of the features of being depressed.

And by the way, depression is often treated in our modern conversations as if it's a mental illness that needs an antidepressant. A lot of times people who go through this doctor say, you know, do you need a, maybe an antidepressant to help you for the next few months or whatever? It's not a disease. It's not a disease to miss somebody.

It's not a disease to feel the emptiness when somebody who meant the world to you or a very large part of the world to you suddenly is gone and they're not coming back. That's just normal. Now, if you're still feeling that way five years later, then you're not progressing.

But certainly I would say this. I actually recovered from the death of my wife much more quickly than from the loss of my 20 year marriage. When my wife left the faith and left the family.

It took me years to get over that emotionally. I mean, I was functioning after the first year about normal, but, but the world was the world was great, you know? And and that's sort of like a death only worse. Actually, I will tell you this.

If you've lost a loved one to death, there's only one thing that's harder to go through as far as I know. And that's losing one to divorce by everyone I've talked to who's

experienced both would say the divorce was harder than the death because the death, you know, the person who's dying, if they were Christian. And of course my wife was that they're happy now.

I'm the one who said not them, that they are. They're in a good place. You know, they, they made it.

They're overcomers. They got out alive, you know? And, and we haven't yet. We start to fight the battles.

We still have to go through the, the struggles of life. They don't have to do it anymore. They're in a good place and it's all good for them.

Just not for me without them. But when, when you go through a divorce, when your spouse leaves, there's all kinds of other emotional things there. For one thing, they're not in a good place.

You know, they left the faith. They left, they left the family. They're, they're, they're not in a good place.

They're in a self-destructive place. And if they die in that condition, it's not going to be good for them. And you've also feel the rejection.

When you're, when your spouse dies, you don't have to feel rejection. They didn't reject you, but if they leave you, they, they did. And when they divorce you, you know that you might see them with somebody else someday.

You're not going to see your deceased spouse with somebody else someday. You don't have to cope with that. You won't have with, if your spouse is deceased and you're young enough to, like I was, I was 27 when my wife died.

She was 25. You won't be having tug of wars over the children. As in the case of a divorce or over other things that the family had.

In other words, when the, when you're the spouse, you lost is still alive, but have made themselves an enemy. And you still love them, but they don't love you. That loss is, has a lot of dynamics that are harder than just losing them in death.

Now, of course, if the one you lost in death is not a Christian, that brings more difficulties. We're going to talk about that as well in the course of this evening, but depression is a normal part of bereavement, regardless how you lose somebody. And of course, once somebody is gone, you begin to have all the, the whys, you know, why did this happen? Why, why, why did this family not have that happen to them? How come these parents haven't, this couple of fights like cats and dogs, but they don't break up or this, this person had cancer, but they got better.

You know, how come it's different? How come God did this? Where was God in this situation? And there's also sometimes guilt. If there has been any kind of misbehavior, for example, you were angry with them the last time you saw them, or, you know, you, you didn't treat them right in some way. If you feel like you didn't treat them right, and now they're dead, you know, there's this sense of guilt.

Like I'll never be able to fix that. Now, I remember when I was a kid, I remember one, one morning before my dad went to work, I was angry at him for something he had done that was displeasing me. I'm sure it was my fault, not his, but I was just a bratty little kid being angry at him.

And, and I was, you know, angry at him when he left the room. And my mom told me, you should, you should make it right with your dad. What if, what if something would happen and you would, and he would die today, you know, and you'd know that this is the last conversation you had with him.

That I took that to heart. Obviously I was probably six, seven years old. Maybe, I don't know, but, but, uh, that struck me.

Yeah. You want every conversation to be the kind you'd want your last one to be. Because when you do lose somebody, you can always think, and the devil will no doubt always bring to your conscience, all those things you can't change.

Now things that would have been just a passing disagreement or argument or unpleasantness that you would buy evening have cleared up and things would be back to normal, but that's not going to happen now. And you just have this inability to make things right that you wish now had never been wrong. And there's guilt.

There's regrets. I mean, I'm sure that most people, when their parents die, or when their children die, they have regrets. I wish I'd spent more time with them.

You know, I wish I had really just, you know, made more sacrifices to, to, to listen to them. And, you know, you think of these things and you have these regrets and you have this guilt and you have these wise and all of these things. And one of the hardest things about it.

And this is something that I think Job experienced because he lost 10 children in one day, as well as all his, all of his possessions and his health. I mean, he lost it all except for his wife, his wife survived, but he lost everything. And it seems like he took that rather well.

When, when he lost things, he said, well, the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord. And when his wife wanted to complain about it, he said, you'd speak like one of those foolish women. Should we receive only the good things from the Lord and not the evil things also? I mean, he's handling it pretty well.

And then came his friends and their conversations and their interpretations and so forth. And they started to raise questions about Job's relationship with God. Like Job, if you, if God was really happy with you, this wouldn't have happened.

He's got something against you. You're doing something wrong. And Job's problem.

And this is where he lost it. This is where he stopped being calm and he stopped having the victory. Really? He started saying, no, I don't understand.

I have done everything God wants me to do. I haven't got some kind of dark secret that I'm hiding from you people. I was doing everything right.

And this happened to me, but he says, that's what bothers me. I don't understand why God is doing this to me. And really what bothered Job more than the loss of his family or goods or health or anything else was the questions that raised about his relationship with God.

Like where's God? How come I thought I had a good, I thought God and I were friends. How come he's treating me like an enemy? And he didn't get any answers for a while. In fact, he never did.

He never got any answers. Even when God shows up at the end of the book and talks for six chapters, after God's finished talking, he still hasn't given me any answers. He just said, you know, you're a creature I'm created.

Let's keep that straight. You know, and you know, it's interesting. Job never gets an explanation as far as we know, but the thing that was so galling is what it did to his concept of his relationship with God.

I thought that if I do these things the way I'm doing, and then God would always be favorable toward me and we had a good thing going, but I've been doing all this stuff. And God is treating me like I'm an enemy. And that was what was so hard.

C.S. Lewis in his book, *The Grief Observed*, had a paragraph that reminded me of that a little bit. He said, as he's talking about the struggles he's going through, he says, meanwhile, where's God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing him.

So happy that you are tempted to feel his claims upon you as an interruption. If you remember yourself and turn to him with gratitude and praise, you will be, or so it feels welcomed with open arms, but go to him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain. And what do you find a door slammed in your face and the sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside after that silence? Why is he so present a commander in our time of prosperity? And so very absent to help in time of trouble.

This is one of the parts of the book that makes some Christians uncomfortable with a grief observed because Lewis talks very honestly the way that many people are tempted to think. And he was tempted to think that way, you know, so where's God when he's supposed to be here? The God that I always thought was near when things were going good. Now I really need him and I'm not getting what I need.

Now I didn't, I personally didn't experience that when my wife died. I actually did sense God near, you know, the Bible says he's near to the broken hearted and, um, but, and yet I know Christians who have felt, uh, you know, estrangement from God at times like this. I don't know what the difference is between one person and another in this respect.

And that's partly why I'm reading Lewis because I think that he, he's more normal. I think, I think his experience is more what more people experienced than what I did. I'm going to share of course more about my experience, but I, I don't want to give the impression that if your experience is different than mine, that you're not okay.

I mean, CS Lewis is a great Christian man, but he had these kinds of thoughts in his head, as I think a great number of Christians do when they go through things like this. Now you might've heard something about the five stages of grieving. I've, I've seen writings about this from the secular world and from the Christian world.

Uh, Elizabeth Kubler Ross who's not a Christian wrote books on death and dying back in the, uh, I guess it was in the, it must've been the eighties and, uh, some bestselling books at that, you know, you know, she talked to and interviewed and studied people who had near death experiences or had died and came back and things like that. And she's a, like a new age kind of person who, who studied the subject to death. She, it's her studies that came up with this classic idea of when people are dying, they go through this tunnel, uh, you know, and there's a white light at the end.

You've probably heard that that whole imagery and that's largely comes from her research and writings. And as a non-Christian, she said that there are five stages that people go through when they're grieving. Some of them, I don't understand very well because I didn't go through them when I grieved.

But, uh, but then I, I was not those who have no hope, but I'm sure that most of her patients that she dealt with were probably not Christians. And therefore those who don't have any hope, no doubt do go through these stages of grieving. Uh, she identified them as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and then acceptance.

So eventually you come to a place where you accept the loss, but first you go through denial. And that I suppose is trying to pretend like it hasn't happened. Try to pretend that they're, you know, you're going to walk around the corner and they're, they will be standing there alive and healthy again, just, uh, you know, denying that this has really happened, just not dealing with it, not, not willing to face it squarely and say, okay, this

is the new normal.

I've got to deal with, but just trying to pretend or ignore or pre, uh, hope that this isn't really what it is. I remember after my wife died, having dreams sometimes that lo and behold, I went someplace and there she was alive again after she had died. I thought, oh, I thought you were dead, but I'm so glad that you're back.

You know, uh, that I didn't ever do that when I was conscious. It was only my sleep that happened, but I, I never went through a denial. I think, but this strong temptation to hope against hope that maybe this really didn't happen.

Maybe, maybe you were misinformed. Maybe it was a miss, you know, someone made the call too quickly or something and they're not really dead. But denial is the first stage of grieving that these non-Christians go through apparently then anger.

And this anger sometimes turned toward God. People do get angry at God and some of them lose their faith. Some people actually turn against God when they lose loved ones.

Um, and don't come back. Others are just angry for a little bit. They just want to express their anger towards someone.

And they, and God seems to be a, uh, someone that they can complain against and they don't get immediately shut down for it. So they, they use him or other people. Of course, if somebody is responsible, some other party responsible, like when my, my wife of 20 years left the kids and me, I never felt totally angry at her because I felt like she had exhibited some kind of things in her mind that I felt were not under her control.

Uh, but, but there was a neighbor lady who was supposed to be a Christian who had kind of talked her into leaving because she was unhappy. I thought, doesn't this woman know better than that? She's supposed to be a Christian. She was like, she, her husband was an elder in the church they went to.

And I thought I was angry at this woman. You know, I, I, when I think of my wife who had left, I wasn't angry at her so much, but I was angry at this woman who had caused it or had had something to do with encouraging it. And likewise, if some, obviously if somebody had done something that was responsible for my wife's death, well, someone did actually.

She was hit by a car. So I guess someone did have something to do with it, but I didn't get angry. In fact, I wanted, I wanted to speak to that young man.

He was a 16 year old kid who was driving a car and accidentally came around a corner too fast for my wife was walking and hit her and killed her right away. Instantly. It was Thanksgiving day, 1980, uh, November 27th.

In the morning before Thanksgiving dinner. And, um, I remember, I remember thinking she was hit by a 16 year old boy, that poor kid. I remember thinking he's going to have a hard Thanksgiving and probably rest of his life too.

And I really was hoping I could go and talk to him and tell him as a Christian, I forgive him. I don't, I, you know, I've, I haven't always been reckless in my driving. I've just been fortunate that when I've come around a curb too wide or too fast, there wasn't a pedestrian there for me to kill.

You know, I mean, he was no more guilty than I have been at times. He was just more unlucky. You know, I really wasn't angry at him at all.

Not, not even tempted to be. I just felt like, oh, that kid's going to have a hard life from age 16 on knowing that he saw a woman splattered on the grill of his truck alive in front of him and dead behind him. That's I mean, I had a hard time when I hit a squirrel once like that.

And a raccoon another time, just hitting the animal, seeing it alive in front of you and dead behind you. Oh, that feels horrible. But if it's a human being, uh, that's hard to get over, I'm sure.

So I never really felt angry at him. Some people might, I suppose, in that situation. There's a sequel to that.

I know my wife will want me to tell that I hadn't ever been permitted to speak to that boy because his lawyer wouldn't let me near him. I think the lawyer assumed that I would try to get information that I could use in court to sue or something like that, which I had no interest in doing. I didn't sue.

I don't believe in suing. So anyway, I wasn't able to see him and I lost track of him eventually. I didn't even know where they were keeping him.

He was in juvenile hall for a while because it was a hit and run. But, um, and then he turned himself in. But, uh, but I lost totally track of him until just about two, two, three years ago.

Uh, thanks to the internet, I was able to look him up and find him. And I had a talk with him on the phone. He's in his fifties now, of course.

And, uh, and, uh, he, we had a great talk. He's not a Christian, but his uncle is, and he's close to his uncle. But, uh, yeah, he, he said it was still, still something that bothered him, you know, that he'd hit her.

I mean, I felt so sorry for him. I felt glad to be able to tell him, you know, I never held that against you. You know, I forgive you.

I don't know what that was worth to him, but it couldn't have been worth nothing. And so I was glad to do that. But a lot of people, they, their responses, first denial.

And then when they get over the dial, they're angry, angry at somebody who caused this is a God. A lot of people get angry at God. Sometimes they turn the anger inward.

It's my fault. I've always, you know, I just, I didn't treat them right. I don't have any more opportunity to make that right.

And they feel angry at themselves. Uh, the third step is said to be bargaining and I'm not sure I understand that very well. I certainly never did that either.

But bargaining is supposedly, I guess, when you're trying to bargain with God and saying, if I, yeah, I guess this may be before they're dead. I'm not really sure. I can't tell you what bargaining is, but that's on Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's list.

Depression is next. I understand that well enough. And then acceptance.

I understand that too. But, but these five stages of grieving are something that apparently people go through who aren't Christians. And maybe a lot of Christians do too, because I've also found five stages of grieving talked about in Christian books, like the book written by Minnerth and Meyer, the Christian psychologist and psychiatrist who wrote a book back in the, or whenever it was, I don't know when they wrote it back in the eighties, probably called happiness is a choice.

And in that book, they said, these are Christians. These are Christian psychologists. They said every normal human being after suffering a significant loss or reversal goes through all five stages of grief.

And here's the ones they list similar, but not identical to the ones that the secular psychologists and doctors talk about. Denial is first on this list. Then anger turned outward, possibly toward God.

Anger turned inward. Weeping. And then resolution, which I accept, I consider to be acceptance.

The same as the last one on the other list. Now, in other words, this list is almost the same. They don't have bargaining on it.

Just they break anger up into anger turned outward and anger turned inward instead of having bargaining on the list. But for the most part, these two Christian mental health professionals say every normal person after suffering a significant loss or reversal goes through all five stages of grief. I thought, I guess I'm abnormal because I didn't go through them.

I remember when, and I didn't know at the time about these five stages of grief, but I

guess some of the people who came to comfort me when my wife was killed, they must have been aware of this because when they came to me to comfort me, they saw that I was actually doing pretty well, that I wasn't falling apart. I have to attribute that to the grace of God, again, which I'll say more about later. But God was giving me plenty of grace.

I was not really that shaken up. I wasn't angry. I wasn't screaming.

I wasn't losing my faith. And therefore, I seemed pretty normal to them. And they said, oh, well, you need to be careful because you're just going through denial right now.

This is the first stage, but just wait. In a couple months, this is going to hit you really hard like a ton of bricks. And I thought, what a strange thing to say, that I'm going through denial.

I'm not denying she's dead. To me, when the paramedics said she's dead, I thought, well, I guess she's dead. I've lost her.

It wasn't quite that unemotional, but it was something that I was willing to cope with and say, okay, this is the new normal for me. And God gave me support in it so that I wasn't in denial. I was actually in affirmation, the opposite of denial.

I was affirming that she was with the Lord. When I heard she was dead, I instantly knew she was with the Lord. In fact, when I said out loud right there by the ambulance on the street, I said, well, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. And it may sound very unemotional, but there was plenty of emotion, but there was also trust in God. I mean, God's in control of this situation.

I didn't expect this to happen today. But I did know that it would happen someday, not necessarily a traffic accident. But I knew that either someday I'm going to be standing by her deathbed when she expires, or she's going to be standing by mine when I expire.

You know that when you get married, unless you die together, one of you is going to lose the other. And everybody's going to lose both of you eventually. When people have asked me, did you ever get angry at God because he took your wife? I thought, well, why would I be angry at God? I knew when I married her she was going to die.

I just didn't know she was going to die six months after the wedding. I didn't know she was going to die at age 25. That was not expected, but I knew she'd die.

And frankly, if she had died at age 95 instead of 25, it wouldn't have been any easier for me. It's never easy to lose a spouse. And it might even be harder after 70 years of marriage than after six months of marriage.

You never know. In any case, God knows best. And God has all the prerogatives.

As far as I'm concerned, my life was surrendered to God. Nothing I own is mine, including my own life. I've been bought with a price.

I'm not my own. My wife is not mine. My children are not mine.

My home is not mine. Nothing I have is mine. I'm not even mine.

So if God wants to do something with His things, including my children, my wife, even me, well, I guess I never saw any reason to get mad at God. I could say, God, I wasn't really expecting that today. But on the other hand, maybe I was.

I wasn't really. But I remember the day before that, I think God might have given me a premonition, but it wasn't that specific, because I remember I was riding in a car with a Christian friend, a guy, and I was just saying to him, you know, I really just feel like my life's been so smooth. Everything's been so wonderful without a hitch.

I haven't had any trials recently. Almost like wonder, you know, if, you know, if that's going to go on like that for long. And then the next day my wife was killed.

So I thought, well, maybe that was God preparing me. After all, if I complain, He'd say, remember, you said you hadn't had any trials for a long time. And it was really true.

So anyway, I didn't go through denial. I didn't get angry. And so these things that are said to be every normal human being goes through them when someone dies, I would say apparently it is a normal course of, you know, psychological adjustment that most people go through.

However, I don't think those stages are necessary. It was not something I went through. And the reason is, as I've said a couple times already, in 1 Thessalonians 4.13, Paul is writing to the Thessalonians about people who have died.

Although the Thessalonian church had not been a church for very long, Paul had only been there a few weeks earlier and had, as far as we know, only preached in Thessalonica for three weeks before he was driven out of town and wrote to them shortly afterwards. Very young church, but already someone had died. Maybe several people have died.

Maybe some of the converts were real old and they died shortly after Paul left. But he's writing to the church about this. And in chapter 4.13 says, But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, which is Paul's euphemism for who died.

Lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. Now the King James says, Lest you grieve as others who have no hope. Now, obviously, he's talking about losing loved ones.

People have died. And he says, I don't want you to sorrow or grieve the way other people do have no hope. And then he goes on to talk about the resurrection, goes on to talk about how when Jesus comes back, he's going to raise the dead.

Immortal will always be with the Lord. And that's that is the hope that we have that others do not. And I remember, you know, as soon as I saw my wife dead at the side of the road, I remember thinking, I'll see her again.

We're going to that body that's all broken up into pieces, little pieces is because every bone in her body is broken. The paramedics said. That's going to be whole again.

She's going to be in resurrected bodies. We'll see each other again. This is not permanent.

And that does make a big difference. You know, Jesus said that it's a blessing to mourn. Jesus blessed her to lay who mourn.

They should be comforted. Now, he didn't indicate that everybody will be comforted. In fact, in that's in Matthew five, four, the Matthews version of the Beatitudes in the Beatitudes in Luke chapter six.

He said, blessed are you who weep. You should be comforted that they said, well, once you who laugh now, you shall weep and mourn. Those who are currently mourning and who are righteous will have occasion to be joyful again someday.

Those who are ignoring God, they don't grieve over their sins or anything else. They're just insulated from troubles. And, you know, like like the psalmist said in Psalm 73, you know, the wicked, they just seem to have lives free from trials.

But he says, I know it'll go well for the for the righteous and not for the unbeliever. But we mourn sometimes and we might even mourn more than nonbelievers do in some ways over an unsaved loved one who dies because we know something about an afterlife. We don't know everything.

We know something. We know there's a judgment. And in some cases, we might fear for the eternal well-being of our loved ones, which a non-Christian wouldn't have that.

In his thinking, you know, he doesn't know about eternity. We do. And that can even make us more and more.

But we find that it says in Psalm 34, verse 18, God is near to those who are of a broken heart. And he does draw near. And that is what that's what actually every trial I've been through, whether it's whether it's losing a wife to death, losing a wife to abandonment or whatever.

Or even at the present time, losing some of my children who are not dead. But, you

know, it would have been in some ways not as hard if they had died when they were faithful Christians than that they live far from God. It's hard.

But but but the trials are not in a vacuum. When you walk with God, God walks with you. And when you go through deep valleys, he draws near.

Everybody's heard, I'm sure, that old poem about the footsteps of the sand and how, you know, the times that were really hard times, how he carried you. That's why there's only one set of footsteps in the hard times. There's two steps, two sets at other times.

Well, that's true. He does carry you when you're weak. If you're if you're brokenhearted and you're looking to him faithfully, he carries you and he draws near.

And actually, I will say that, well, I don't know that I would have chosen to go through those things in order to have that nearness of God. It was, in some respects, the sweetest times of of my fellowship with God was when I was going through those valleys. I have to say, I just many times I was just filled with with grace given to me unexpectedly as I was at the deepest point of grief.

And I just praise God as I walked through my house, you know, feeling like I was torn out, you know, when you're when your family's gone and or whatever, you just feel like someone's taking a big spoon and scraped out all your insides. And yet at those times, when you're when God draws near, you know, that blessedness that comes with mourning as a Christian because God is does not leave us alone. When C.S. Lewis talked about, you know, when he's suffering, that God seems to have bolted the door and isn't accessible.

I'm not really sure what was how to explain that particular thing. It was a mood he was going through and he later he later got over it. You know, there are definitely times when God doesn't seem to be near in trials.

But there are also those times because of the trial that God does draw near. You know, I never I never came to appreciate the Psalms so much as when I was grieving. There were times when I'd go to bed at midnight, wake up at three in the morning, couldn't get back to sleep because, well, the bed was empty.

You know, there's there was someone supposed to be there. It was never going to be there again. And I remember I just couldn't sleep many times for months.

And I would just get up when I wake up and I just opened the Psalms. I'd read them out loud as prayers. It was amazing.

I'd read a block of 15 of them in a row. And every single one of them, no matter where they were in this altar, every single one of them had something that spoke directly to me. Like, wow, yeah, this is really what I need to be praying these prayers.

There's times I couldn't pray. Like Paul said, there's times we don't know what to pray for as we ought. Times I, you know, you just feel so drained of emotion and drained of everything that you just don't know what to pray for.

You know, you need God, but you don't know what to say. Just reading those Psalms out loud as prayers was really a lifesaver for me. And I remember when I was a teenager hearing older Christians sometimes say how much they love the Psalms.

And as a teenager, I didn't like the Psalms. When I read them, I thought, I don't like poetry anyway that much. And they're just kind of emotional things.

And I just was not that emotional. And I just didn't have any real reason to like the Psalms particularly. I couldn't understand why some people say that was their favorite part.

But you go through a few deep waters, a few great trials and griefs. Suddenly you find out what the Psalms are about. And you find out that they are a life preserver thrown out to you in a stormy sea, you know, when you otherwise might drown.

The reason that we don't grieve as others who have no hope is partly because we have this God coming to us near to the brokenhearted. This blessedness that Jesus spoke of, of those who mourn, that God is near. And there's a special blessing that can't even be explained because it doesn't make you feel happy, but it gives you a deep seated comfort and joy.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1, he said, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all of our affliction. And it sounds like he's saying, I'm so glad to have this comfort of God in my affliction that it's better to have the affliction and the comfort than to never have the affliction and never know the comfort. There is a nearness of God that is different when you've got nothing else to comfort you but God.

And you look to God that that is something that comes only at those times in that degree, I believe. And it makes you thankful to go through it, although you're still hurting in the midst of it. Another reason that Christians do not grieve the same way or should not grieve the same way as others who have no hope is because we have what others do not have.

And that's an eternal perspective on things. In 2 Corinthians 4, verses 16 and 17, Paul said, For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, like a lifetime is a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. Now that's the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. One

difference is that we are not looking at what is seen.

The things that are most real to us are the things that no one can see, like God. God's not seen, but he's eternal and he's real. And Christians know God.

And we look to God at times like this. Even knowing that the angels are there is helpful, though I don't ever recommend people trying to get in contact with angels like people like to do sometimes. But just knowing that the angels that God has assigned to our protection would have been able, if God had willed, to bring about a different outcome.

The angel of the Lord encamps around about them that fear him and delivers him. It says in Psalm 34, 7. And that being so, it means that the unseen angels that God has told us about, we have never seen them. They are available.

God, not available as to command, but God commands them. God gives them instructions. He could have, the angels could have protected us.

Like Jesus said, I could have called 12 legions of angels and they deliver it, but it wasn't God's will. And so he didn't. But knowing that God had all the resources, if he wished, to prevent this death, to prevent this trial, God can handle everything.

And he chose to do it this way. I have to look to the reality of the unseen realm because that's the eternal realm. I don't look at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen.

And he says, therefore, our light affliction, which is only but for a moment. And Paul's was for a lifetime, but still that a lifetime is a moment. It works for us an eternal weight of glory.

And we're looking at the eternal, not at the temporal. At least we should be. Now, I realize that in times of great prosperity, as our nation is known for many years and most of our lifetime.

And we believe in God, but we don't have to look to God so much because we have money. We have plenty of food on the store shelves. We have medical facilities.

If we get sick, we've got all kinds of things we can look to besides God. We're not really persecuted. We don't have to set a guard at the door to warn us if the police show up because we're having a Christian meeting that we just really have a pretty easy life.

Now, that may change for us in the near future. As many people who are in touch with what's going on are suspecting this part of the world is changing very quickly. And some of us could probably change in a few months.

And it may be that we'll have to have underground meetings before very long because what we believe is becoming illegal to talk about publicly. And already some people have

gone to jail in this country for taking a stand for Christian truth, which is politically incorrect and not permitted anymore. So that being the case, maybe we'll find out how much our focus will be on eternal things and things that are not seen.

Once the things that are seen, which are our present comfort so often are taken away. But when a loved one is taken away, it's always beyond our control because if we could have controlled it, it wouldn't have happened. We wouldn't have let it happen.

The loss of a loved one, anything you're grieving, mourning is something that happened that you had no control over. And you begin to sense how weak you are, how not in control of your life or anyone else's you are, how quickly things can happen. You just got no recourse but to watch it happen and pain and experience pain in the midst of it.

And yet you have to realize everything you look at is that way. Everything is going to burn. Everything is going to pass away, including yourself.

But there is something eternal. And once you begin to refocus on the eternal, and that's not something you should just do when you lose loved ones, that should be the mindset of the Christian every single day. And I think that might be one reason why, you know, I went through the loss a little differently than some people do because I'm a full time Bible teacher.

I'm always thinking about the things of God. I mean, some people have to go work a real job, you know, and they get the luxury of thinking about the Bible in their free time. But I think C.S. Lewis would be one of those too.

He's a university professor. He had to think about his classes. They weren't Christian classes.

They were secular classes. You know, he could think about his Christian thoughts at other times, but he had to focus on other things a lot of time. And in my case, because of what I do, I was able to always be meditating day and night on the Word of God.

And that's what I do. And so my mind was always on eternal things. So when she died, the first thing I thought was, well, of course, that's going to happen.

These things are temporal. People are temporal. But there are there's an eternal realm.

And I'm going to see her again. And we're all going to go there who are Christians. So focusing on the eternal perspective gives the Christian an edge.

In fact, gives the Christian a means of survival emotionally at times like this. Of course, we also know something the rest of the world doesn't. And that is the saving work of Christ.

Christ has made it possible for us to endure all things through his strength because he

has saved us. He's removed the barriers between us and God. We don't have to be afraid that we or anyone we love who's a Christian will have any problems facing God and being joyful about it.

Paul, therefore, said in Philippians 121, which we all know that for me to live is Christ, but to die is gain. And gain means improvement. I really believe that some Christians quote it, but they don't believe it.

They think they do until they lose someone or until they're looking at death. And suddenly they're not so sure death is gain. But Paul believed it.

And I believe it. And I think probably many of you do. Maybe all of you do.

The thing is, you really have to believe it at times like this. And when you do, the Christian's knowledge that to die is gain because Christ has saved. Christ has died and risen again.

The salvation we have in Christ is that which makes death a gain. It's not a gain to unbelievers. But it is definitely a gain to Christians and that transforms the experience of grieving.

If the loved ones we've lost, of course, are believers. Also, of course, as I said, the resurrection. When Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4, 16 through 18, that the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout.

With the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain, shall we caught up together with them to meet them in the clouds? And thus shall we ever be with the Lord.

He then said, therefore, comfort one another with these words. This is the comfort of the believer in the face of death. That Christ is going to come.

There is going to be a trumpet sound. There is going to be the dead raised. And the living raised too.

If we don't die before then, we'll meet them in the air. Before we die. If we die first, we'll go up ahead of those who are still alive.

Maybe that's another reason to die is gain. You get to go there first. You get to be in front of the line at the resurrection.

But in any case, these truths, if they are real to you, they utterly transform the experience of grieving over loss. Now, I just want to talk a little bit about how bereavement serves as a real reality check for us as Christians. And this is not going to take very long, I trust.

Certain questions and certain reorienting of our thinking takes place when we lose a loved one. And the first thing we have to ask ourselves and what is seemingly answered by the experience and by our responses, Do I really believe all those things we were just talking about? Do I really believe eternity is long and time is short? Do I really believe I'm going to see this person again? Do I really believe that Christ has paved the way to an eternal happiness for this person and for us all? Do I believe these things? Well, I thought I did. But now that this happens, I get to find out if I did or not.

Because these experiences are tremendous tests to let us know how much we really believe what we think we believe. Again, C.S. Lewis wrote this in his grieving. He says, you never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you.

It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it? And that's true.

When your beliefs become a matter of life and death, and they do when someone you love dies, and you try to cope with that. That's when you find out, do I really believe these things or have I just been kind of mouthing what Christians say? Because Christians say, I'm a Christian, so I say it too. It really is a reality check.

Am I a believer really? Or have I only been fooling myself to think I'm a believer? Because now I'm in a position that I've got to learn, I've got to believe. And if I can't do that, then maybe I wasn't a believer as much as I thought. Another thing about this that's a reality check is it brings us back into touch with the phenomenon of our own mortality.

You know, it says in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verses 2 through 4. It's better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting. By that he means to a funeral than a party. The house of mourning is a funeral.

The house of feasting is a party. Better to go to a funeral than a party. He says, because that is the end of all men, and the living shall take note and learn.

Solomon said, going to a funeral wakes you up to the reality of your mortality. Of course, you know it in the back of your mind all the time, even when no one's dying. But when someone close to you dies, you think, wait a minute, they were here just the other day.

They were here just last Christmas. They're not going to be here next Christmas. What's up with that? You know, I mean, it's like, yeah, we're all mortal.

That could have been me. It could be me before next Christmas. We're all going to die.

And that is a really good thing to know. I used to read a Puritan writer named William

Law sometimes. And he made up a story about a man.

He made up a lot of illustrations about people. He let the reader know they were fiction, but they were illustrative. So this man who had been, you know, healthy and a bit prosperous in his business, suddenly was taken ill, you know, in the middle of his life.

He was not very old. And he was on his deathbed. And his friends came to visit him and to show their grief because he was dying.

The doctors had given him a lot. He was going to die. And then William Law gives this speech that this man makes to his friends.

And the man's kind of a nominal Christian, so he kind of believes in Christianity and kind of not. But the speech he gives is very phenomenal. But basically, he ends up saying, you know, what is it about a little bit of good health and, you know, a little bit of activity and business and so forth that keeps away from our thoughts? The kinds of thoughts that we will all have when we're lying in this condition on their deathbed.

On your deathbed, you will think differently, probably, than you think at other times. Because then you are face to face with your mortality. And you realize, let's see, did I use my life the way I wanted to? Did I spend as much time with my kids as I wish I had? You know, did I, could I have done things differently? And you begin to think in different categories when you say, okay, life is over now.

How do I want to assess the way I lived before? Well, the purpose of this illustration in that book was to show that we should all be living with those thoughts now. Because although we don't know if we're going to die right away, any of us could. And we all live in a world which guarantees we're going to die.

And someday, if we're lucky enough to have a deathbed, if we don't die suddenly. But if we have time to reflect on our deathbed over our past, we're going to have some reasons to say, you know, why didn't I think of these values when I had some time to do something about them? And going to a funeral, losing someone who you didn't think was going to die young, it makes you think about your mortality. And it should.

It's one of the healthiest things in the world to always keep in mind. I could die. Better people than me have died today.

I could die today, tomorrow, sometime soon, 10 years from now, whenever I'm going to die. And how will I wish at that time that I will look back on what I'm doing today? If I'm going to die 20 years from now or 30 years from now, and I look back on this day that I'm living right now, how will I think then about the way I'm living now? How will I wish I had lived? What will I wish I would have done today? That's what I should be doing. I should be living in light of my mortality because it's a reality.

And it's brought back to your attention when you go to a funeral or when you lose someone, when someone dies. That's a reality check for us all. And then, of course, you've got to ask, if saying, wow, this just is, I'm just stunned by this loss.

You got to ask, well, what did you think life was supposed to be like? Did you have a rosy set of glasses on? You thought life was just a playground, just Disneyland? Or did you think this is a battleground? This is a war zone here. People get killed. Everyone does.

Eventually, the mortality rate is 100% for the human race. No one gets out alive unless they happen to be in the last generation when Jesus comes back, and we might not be there. But what did you think life was supposed to be? Let me just readjust my thinking.

This is reality. C.S. Lewis had some reflections like this in his book. He said, from the rational point of view, what new factor has Helen's death, that was his wife, introduced into the problem of the universe? What grounds has it given me for doubting all that I believe? I knew already that these things, and worse, happened daily.

I would have said that I had taken them into account. I had been warned. I had even warned myself not to reckon on worldly happiness.

We were even promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, blessed are they that mourn, and I accepted it.

I've got nothing that I hadn't bargained for. Of course, it is different when the thing happens to oneself, not to others, and in reality, not in imagination. Yes, but should it, for a sane man, make quite such a difference as this? No, and it wouldn't for a man whose faith had been real faith, and whose concern for other people's sorrows had been real concern.

The case is too plain. If my house has collapsed at one blow, that is because it was a house of cards. The faith which took these things into account was not faith, but imagination.

The taking them into account was not real sympathy. If I had really cared, as I thought I did, about the sorrows of the world, I should not have been so overwhelmed when my own sorrows came." Now, what he's saying is, I should have not been surprised. I know people die all the time.

I just didn't think about it until my wife died. I remember hearing someone say, I can't believe in God anymore because, you know, my three-year-old daughter got cancer and died. I remember thinking, well, didn't you know before your daughter died that there are three-year-olds dying all over the world? Why could you believe in God then, but you can't when it happens to your daughter? Is your daughter more important than the daughters of other people who are dying? I mean, were you unaware that people are dying every moment as we speak? That the crisis you're going through is experienced by

a million times over every year? But knowing that about other people didn't make you doubt God.

It's only when it happens to you that it makes you doubt God. What's up with that? And that's what C.S. Lewis is saying. I knew these things happen all the time, but I thought I took them into account.

But if my faith is shaken now, it's because I must not have really had the sympathy for others that I thought I did or the faith that I thought I had. Well, really, what this comes down to when we lose loved ones is we have to ask ourselves, what does this show me that I love most? Who do I love most, God or the person I lost? Remember, Jesus said in Matthew 10, verse 37, he that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. He that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

In other words, you've got to love Jesus more than even those people closest to you and that you love the most. And you find out if that's true when he takes them, which he has every right to do. Now, if you love God, you'll love his will for your life, even if it's hard.

You'll embrace the trials just like Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Peter tried to stop Jesus from being arrested and killed, Jesus said, what the cup my father has given me, shall I not drink it? Hey, it's my father. I love my father.

I want my father's will. I actually just prayed a few moments ago. Not my will, but yours be done.

Why? Because God's will is my joy because I love him. Whenever you love somebody, their happiness is your happiness. Their will is more important than your will.

You'd rather die than see them suffer. You'd rather go to great expense to make them happy than have somebody do the same for you. When you love somebody, it's the nature of love.

And you know this when you're in love. Sometimes, you know, infatuation or whatever, you feel this the most. I want to just, you know, make myself poor, enriching this other person that's almost an object of worship.

Love is something that you're happy to make somebody else happy, even at your own pain and expense. That's true if we love God, too. If I love God, then I should be happy that he's happy.

And the more I spend, the more I lose, that his will will be done in my life. Well, the happier I should be if I love him most. But if I love me most or I love that other person most, then I'm going to be upset with God because he required that of me.

And this really is a reality check for us. We say we love God, but if we really love God,

then we'll say, God, if this is what pleases you, I'm glad to suffer. I offer my sufferings up as an offering to you.

It's always nice to know what to offer someone who's got everything. You know, what do you give to someone who's got everything? God's got everything. What can you give him? Well, you can give him your cheerfulness in suffering, your love for him saying, I submit to you because your will is better than mine.

And your happiness is more important to me than mine. That's what we offer up to God if we love him. And we find out if we love him or not when we have to go through this kind of a trial.

And as such, of course, it becomes a test of our love and our loyalty to God. That's what Job's was. When Job went through what he went through, it was, it's clearly a test.

Because the devil said to God, well, Job is only worshipping you and loving you because you're so good to him. But if you take these things away, he won't love you anymore. He'll curse you to your face.

And God said, I'll bet he won't. The devil said, I'll bet he will. So God said, OK, you're on, try it.

And so the devil was able to take those things and Job passed the test. His loyalty and his love for God was being tested. Will you still be loyal to God when God seems to be beating you up and you don't know why? Well, if that's what he wants, Job said, if he slays me, I'll still trust him.

That's, that's a passing the test of loyalty when you've lost all your children, lost your health, lost all your possessions. And he says, well, that's what God wants. I'm still going to trust him.

God is first. And we have to realize that when we go through any trial, especially the big trials like this, we're really being tested. We're really in the furnace.

And the enemy is watching. God's watching. And this is something I thought I would share with you because I've, some of you have heard me say it before.

If you've heard me teach before. But when my, when my wife was killed, actually, I came out to the street. A neighbor called and said, your wife was in an accident.

They didn't say she was dead. She was in an accident. And so I went out to the street.

It was up the street a little ways. And the, she'd apparently been hit sometime ago because the ambulance was already there. She was covered up with a sheet on the street.

They were just scraping her off the street at the time. And, and I, and I didn't know she was dead. I, and I said, you know, how bad is it? How, how, how bad is she? And they said, she's dead.

Now, when they said she was dead, I had this picture in my mind. I, I'm reluctant to call it a vision because I don't know if it was inspired by God, but it could have been. It was a picture that came to mind instantly of God and the devil kind of peering over the clouds at me.

Like they had a bet on me. And I felt like God was saying, the devil was saying, I'll bet he will. And God was saying, I'll bet he won't.

And it was like, they were just seeing, will I curse God? Will I bless God? What's it going to be? You know, I, I just knew in my spirit and this, I had this picture in my head. That, okay. As soon as I was told she was dead, I had this picture that I'm under scrutiny here.

The cosmic powers are wondering what I'm going to do here. Even God is watching to see if I'm going to make him proud or not. And that's, it was after that, I said, well, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Because I was determined not to let the devil win that bet. But I also felt something at that time.

And I've shared this before too. Some of you may have had occasion to hear it, but when, when they said she's dead, I not only had that picture, but I also had another picture that came almost simultaneously or maybe immediately afterwards. And it was a picture that reminded me of my childhood when I grew up in Southern California.

And we'd go to the beach down there. And my sister and I, she was two years older. We were little toddlers or just above toddlers.

We'd go out in the shallow water. And when the waves would come and hit us in the ankles, we'd jump to try to stay above them. Because that's really exciting for little kids.

And, but we'd sometimes get out there about knee deep. Then we'd stay above the waves easily. But then they're all of a sudden, you know, one wave in 30 is just really big for some reason.

And we'd see it coming. And you know, this thing is going to, I'm not going to jump above. This is going to hit me right in the face and knock me right down under water.

I'm going to be, you know, spitting water on my mouth and stuff like that. So when you see the big wave coming, what do you do? You submerge yourself in the water. It's too late to get out of the water.

You're too far in. So you submerge yourself and you can feel the wave go over. You can

feel the turbulence as a big wave goes over.

But it doesn't hit you. Because you're submerged. And that's the very picture I had in my mind after that other one I just described.

I had that picture in my mind. I felt like I was submerged in the grace of God. And this huge trial.

I was just told that my wife was killed. This turbulence just went right over me. And then subsided again.

I just felt the turbulence. And then it was gone. And it didn't knock me down because I felt like I was totally submerged.

The big wave went overhead and didn't know where I was. You know? And that was, now later on, of course, I felt grief. I wept and things like that.

I mean, I felt emotion for sure. But that stunning blast that I would have expected otherwise was just as protected by the grace of God. And the Bible indicates that the grace of God is given to Christians as we trust in Him.

After all, you know the verse, by grace you're saved through faith. It's trusting in Him that brings the grace of God. In Romans 5, 2, it says, in Him we have access to this grace by faith.

He said, by faith to grace in which we stand. We stand in grace. God's grace is given to us.

Remember, Paul prayed that his thorn would be taken from him. And Jesus said, my grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness.

And there is a supernatural enabling that God gives to His children when they trust in Him. And that is His grace. Well, just in closing, I need to make a couple other points.

And I would have taken a break, but I didn't have another whole hour's worth to take after break. So I thought I'd just plow on through here. I've been talking about losing loved ones that are Christians.

But most Christians have loved ones who aren't Christians. And they die too. And it's hard to know what comfort we can claim at the loss of an unsaved loved one.

Because we know there's a judgment. We know there's wrath. And we know there's a hell.

And we know things like that. And it's not very comforting to think of our loved ones who failed to come to Christ facing those things. And yet, when Paul said to the

Thessalonians, I don't want you to grieve as others who have no hope.

Well, certainly not everyone that they knew that had died was a Christian. This is a brand new church. The church had only been in existence for a few months.

I'm sure many of them had lost unsaved loved ones since most hardly saved people in that town. And yet they had lost loved ones. He said, I don't want you to grieve as others have no hope.

Is there hope for unbelievers? Well, I don't know. But that's an important thing. As you know, I've written a book on the three different views of hell.

And the traditional view of hell that most people have heard and have heard no other is that anyone who dies who has not accepted Christ is just going to be burned forever and ever and ever and ever and ever. No relief forever. I don't know how there could be any comfort in that thought for a Christian.

To think that someone I know, even if it's not someone I love, just so it's someone I don't hate. If it's just my neighbor who I barely know, the thought of them burning and tortured in hell. If they are at Guantanamo Bay and being waterboarded 24-7, I'd feel terrible.

I don't even hate them. I don't even love them. I don't even know who they are.

The thought of anyone being tortured incessantly is unthinkable to me. And if it's someone I love, all the worse. So what comfort is there in that belief? Well, Paul said that Christians have comfort.

And don't grieve as others have no hope. And he did not say that all the dead friends and relatives of Christians are Christians themselves. Some of them are not.

So what possible hope is there in that? Well, I can't get into this in detail. I mean, I'm not here to sell my book. I didn't bring any with me.

But if you want to know the lengthy treatment of these different views of hell, I'll just give you this information. Until the time of Augustine, around the year 400 AD, there was no single paradigm of hell that was commanded in the Orthodox theology of the whole church. There were three different views, and church fathers of equal dignity and respect held each of these views.

Tertullian, for example, in the second century, believed in eternal torment of everyone who was lost. Irenaeus, another church father of the same period, and equally respectable, believed that people will eventually be annihilated. He believed they'd suffer, but they would eventually, their suffering would end, and they would be annihilated rather than tortured forever and ever.

Origen, another church father, who was, by most church historians' assessment, one of the greatest theologians of the early church until Augustine, contemporary with the other two guys I just mentioned, he believed that hell was a place of restoration, where God put people through fires to purge the dross out of them that he couldn't get out of them during their lifetime, but that he's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and that God continues to work on him, believers, after death. Now, I'm not, I don't support any one of those views over the other, because, frankly, all three of those views have scriptural support more than you'd think. I know you can only think of scriptural support for one.

Me too, for most of my life, until I actually studied the views, what the church fathers taught, and what evangelicals who hold each of these views teach now. And I have to say, I'm undecided, because there is a strong biblical case for each of these views. And while I'm not here to push my book, I just want you to know that I give each of these views a chapter of biblical defense from the writers who hold those views in my book.

Each view gets its own chapter, but each view gets a chapter of being criticized scripturally by the other two views. So, I don't champion one view in my book, I just let you see what the scriptural case is for each one, why it was that church fathers held each of them, and none of them was considered heretical. It wasn't until Augustine that Tertullian's view, through Augustine's influence, became the normative view of the church.

And the other two views were eventually, centuries after Augustine, the Catholic Church denounced the other two views as heresies. And that's how it's come down to us. But the fact is, we're not as, we don't have as much grounds as we think we do to insist on the traditional view of hell.

The church fathers who held other views, they spoke Koine Greek as their native tongue. By the way, Augustine didn't. Augustine didn't even read Greek.

He said he couldn't read Greek. He used the Latin Vulgate. And yet, he's the one who made the traditional view the dominant view in the church.

But Origen was a Greek-speaking guy, spoke the same language the New Testament was written in. So was Irenaeus. Actually, Tertullian was a Latin father, so he spoke Latin too.

The point here is, these guys were not stupid. These were guys who respected the Catholic Church, and they couldn't agree among themselves. Nor did they insist on agreement among themselves as to which view of hell the Bible really supports most.

And therefore, there is maybe more hope than we know. That is, in terms of the traditional view of endless torture. Now, by the way, if you don't have any unsaved friends, shame on you.

You should be a person who outreaches to unsaved people. You should have unsaved friends. If you do have unsaved friends, and they die, that should be a great grief to you, no matter which view of hell is true.

Because they died without knowing Jesus. They died without God being able to use them and be glorified in their lives. So there's good reason that that's a tragedy, regardless what view of hell is.

And hell is a place of suffering in all three views. All three views believe it's a place of torment. But they just have different ideas of how long the torment goes and what it's for.

But the point here is, if you think we could be in heaven, partying upstairs, while all of our unsaved loved ones are being in the chamber of horrors in the basement, then you have a different idea of compassion and civility and sanity than I do. I don't know how this can happen. And Christians who insist upon it, they come up with two different possible ideas.

How could we be happy knowing that unbelievers are being tormented forever and ever and ever and ever? Well, one argument is, well, we'll see things God's way more than. We'll be stripped from our human way of seeing things, and we'll be more like God and see it His way. Well, I hope I'll be more like God when I'm in heaven, but it seems to me like He's more merciful than me.

Not less. That He's more forgiving than I am. That He is more Christ-like than I am.

Jesus is supposed to be the image of the Father. And how was Jesus towards sinners? Was He, you know, I mean, tax collectors and sinners? Was He screaming in their face about hell? He wasn't. Now, He did teach about hell, and I believe in hell.

But there's no reason to believe that when I'm more Christ-like, that I'll be less like Christ really was. That somehow I'll be less loving and less merciful to sinners whom God loved and whom He sent His Son to die for than I am now. Being more like God does not make you more callous toward the suffering of other people.

It's the opposite, really. The more Christ-like you become, the less callous you are toward the suffering of others, the more compassionate and the more merciful. So when we think exactly like God does, it doesn't seem like that'll make it easier to cope with the idea of people tortured in hell forever and ever.

God Himself has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, how much less the torture of the wicked. He has no pleasure in that. So how could we take pleasure in it? Now, the other thing is some people say, well, so that we won't be sorry for all those people, God will just wipe all that from our minds and He won't let us know that these people are suffering in hell.

Then we can be happy in heaven. I think, well, that's interesting that God's real plan is so terrible that He can't let us in on it or else we would never approve of it. We could never be happy knowing what God knows about His plan.

God's got some secret from us that if we found out, we wouldn't be so happy. So He's got to keep us in denial and blindness of it. That doesn't make God seem like His plan is all that perfect if He has to blot our minds of it or else we could never approve of it.

I mean, what if you grew up and found out that your father, who you thought was a very virtuous person, had been secretly in the mob and was a hit man on the side, but he couldn't let you know because you might not respect him. Well, that would mean he's not a very good person, that he had to hide his real activities from you lest you hate him. So this whole idea that the early Christians would think, I'm going to be in heaven rejoicing with God while my unsaved loved ones, they're being tortured forever and ever.

It's hard to know how they reason that out. But I know one thing, God is good and God loves sinners more than I do. I've never sent my son to die for any sinners and I'd have a hard time doing it.

God did that. That's how much God loves sinners. And He loved them before they were believers.

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God doesn't just love sinners who have repented. He loves sinners.

And that's why He calls us to repentance, so we can be in a loving relationship back with Him. But the point I want to make is that we don't know exactly what God's going to do to the unbeliever. We know there's a judgment, we know there's suffering, and we would expect that.

If your son was a serial killer and he got killed, you just have to live with the fact, I guess he's going to either be executed or he's going to spend his life in prison, or at least he should. But if you thought he'd be tortured forever and ever and ever and ever and a million years from now, he's going to still be tortured more and it's not even halfway there because there's no there. That'd be a little harder to cope with.

Like, is that really necessary? You know, I realize he did some bad things, really bad things, and really deserves punishment, but is that really called for? Wouldn't God, if He just wished to, couldn't He just put an end to it all right there? Let him suffer and then snuff him? I mean, couldn't He do that? Of course He could. Well, then why would He do something else and let him suffer forever and ever and ever? This is a question, these are questions that people wrestle with. And what I just want to say, what the Bible tells us about God and unbelievers, is that God is more merciful than we are.

Remember when David had sinned and God was going to bring judgment on Israel

because of David's sin, because He numbered the people. And the prophet Gad gave David some options. And he said, listen, you can have like seven years of famine or seven days of plague or whatever.

There's several options that he was given. And in 2 Samuel 24, it's interesting what David said in response, because Gad the prophet was saying, God's going to give you your choice. You can flee from your enemies for three years or whatever.

You know, there's all these things you can do. And David's answer, I thought, was really insightful, because he was a man after God's own heart and he knew God's heart. And he said in 1 Samuel chapter 24 and verse 14, David said to Gad, I am in great distress.

Please let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man. In other words, if it's a choice between God turning over to men or God turning over to Himself to be punished for my sins, let me fall into God's hands because He's merciful. Man isn't.

Don't turn me over to man. They're not as merciful as God is when it comes to dealing with sinners. God is more merciful than man is.

And yet, how many men are there that would torture their enemies forever and ever and ever and ever? And God's more merciful than that? There's an interesting scripture in Lamentations, and I'm going to do what I can to wrap it up with this, but it's often hard to know, to stop bringing up more scriptures because there's so much that's relevant. In Lamentations 3, this is very interesting because it's a book reflecting on God's wrath and judgment on Jerusalem. Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonians because God was angry because the Israelites had worshipped idols, and He has punished them very severely, extremely severely.

And the book of Lamentations is lamenting over God's wrath and judgment on His sinful people. And in the midst of this, it says this, right in almost exactly the center of the book, it says in Lamentations 3, verse 31 through 33, For the Lord will not cast off forever, though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies, for He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Now, notice He's not just talking about Israel, the children of men, that means human beings, not just Israel.

He said, He will not cast off forever. He'll cause grief, but He'll show compassion. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

This is either uninspired, or else God is more merciful even to the wicked when He punishes them than sometimes we give Him credit for. Habakkuk 3.2, praying to God says, In wrath, remember mercy. And we can actually, if we know people who died not on good terms with God, we can actually pray to God in your wrath, which we know is

necessary.

Your wrath on sin cannot be avoided. But remember mercy. What does that mean? What does that look like? I don't know, but I believe God is a good God.

Let me fall into the hands of God, not man. If I'm sinful, and I need to be punished, let God be the one, because His mercies are great, and not man. And so while we don't have any real, I think we don't have any real specific and detailed description of what's exactly gonna happen to everyone who dies without knowing Christ, we do know that we serve a merciful and just God.

And whatever He does, and it may be worse than what we hope, but it will never be worse than it should be. It'll never be less merciful than He is able to be. He'll be always more merciful than we could have been.

God will never be less merciful than He can possibly be. You know, God will always forgive everybody that He can find any excuse to forgive. No doubt there are people He can't find any excuse to forgive them.

But there are people in the Bible who were not believers, like Cornelius, a Gentile. But he set his heart toward God. He didn't know Jesus.

But God sent an angel and said, you know, your prayers are heard by God. He likes what he's hearing. There's a guy over here named Peter.

Go talk to him. He can preach the gospel to you. But what if Cornelius had died before Peter got there? What then? Would he die with God's wrath upon him? Hard to say.

There were lots of Jews who died in the Old Testament before Jesus came, who died under God's mercy, Abraham among them. He believed. But how much mercy God can show to people who've never heard of Christ or have not understood, we don't know.

Because we know that we've witnessed to them and they didn't accept Christ. And we think, well, then they're not innocent. They've heard.

But how much have they understood? God knows that. God knows that. How much of that went right over their head? We don't know.

We figure that God shows mercy to Abraham and David and Moses who never knew the name of Jesus because they responded to the light they had. How much light does our unsafe person have? We really don't know because only God knows the heart. Man looks on the outward appearance and God knows the heart.

But God will be kind and merciful if he can be. And what that looks like, I don't know. But it's got to be something that we will have a full knowledge of in heaven and still say, let's rejoice.

And we just have to take that by faith in God because we don't know everything we need to know. Or we know everything we need to know. We don't know everything we'd like to know, let's put it that way.

So remember the hymn, It Is Well With My Soul. I imagine most of you have heard the story behind that. Horatio Stafford or Spafford.

Was it Spafford or Stafford? I've got it written down here. Spafford, Horatio Spafford. In the 1800s was a prosperous lawyer in Chicago.

And his son died at two years of age. And then the Chicago fire took out a lot of real estate holdings this man had. He lost most of his fortune.

He had four surviving daughters and a wife and they decided to kind of recover from their trauma by making a trip to England. So he sent his wife and four daughters on a ship to England ahead. And he was gonna come over a few days later after he took care of some business in Chicago.

The ship they were on sank and all four of the daughters died, drowned. And his wife survived, sent him a telegram from England saying, survived alone or saved alone, she said. And so he knew that he'd lost not only his son, two year old son, but also four daughters at one time.

And all his holdings, a little bit like Job, losing the whole family, losing all your wealth, everything. And it was as he was following his wife's ship a few days later on a ship going across the Atlantic that it is said that as he was crossing over the place that the captain of the ship said, this is where that other ship went down with your daughters on it. That he wrote the words to that song as he was contemplating his daughters there at the bottom of the ocean right there.

And he said, you know, when peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot thou has taught me to say it as well, as well with my soul. And the rest of the verses like it. But how could that be? How could it be well with my soul when I'm standing on the spot where my four dead daughters died a few days ago? Well, that's supernatural.

That's the grace of God. We are not supposed to live our lives without the grace of God. Those who don't have the grace of God have to cope with these things in their natural strength.

But those who trust God, he gives grace. He gives more grace in the harder times. And the hardest times of all are the times of bereavement.

And it doesn't make the weeping go away. And we should not feel comfortable if it did. If we didn't weep the loss of loved ones, it might tell us we didn't care as much as for them

as really we should have.

But at the same time, weeping can endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. And there is comfort in it. And there is eventually recovery from it.

But the main thing that we have to face in the time of grieving is that we continue to glorify God in it. It's a lot easier to glorify God in some ways when everything's going well. When things are going terribly and we've lost the most valuable thing to us, that's the harder time for us to really praise and glorify God.

But that's something that we're being tested in, like Job was. And it is possible to pass that test. I happen to know from experience it is possible.

And there are others in this room who have passed that test too and know it's possible as well. And I thank God for the grace of God and for the fact that we have resources that the world does not have. I wish they all had it too, because it's a terrible thing.

I always think when I hear of a non-Christian who loses a loved one or goes through a divorce or something like that, I think, how do people without Jesus do this? It's hard enough with Him, but without Him it would seem just impossible. And no one comes through it unscathed. But we can come through it closer to God if we trust Him through the entire experience.

So Father, we do pray for those who may still be hurting. There are some, several have spoken to me tonight, but not too long ago they have been through something very difficult, a loss of a loved one to death or to some other disaster. And there are people who are hurting here tonight.

And those who are not will have their turn. We all will have our turn, because someone we love will go before we do at some point in time. And I pray, Father, that we will always be looking to You, looking not at the things that are seen, but the things that are not seen, receiving that grace that causes us, while our outward man perishes, that our inward man be renewed day by day, that actually through these terrible outward circumstances, terrible for us, that our inward circumstances will be improved as we find that Your grace is sufficient for us, and Your strength has made perfect in our weakness, and that we can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. [♪ music playing ♪] [♪ music playing ♪]