

## Deliverance from Sorrow

### *What Is Your Normal Response to Sorrow?*

When I was in graduate school, Mary Jo and I were newly engaged, and I got a call that my mother had died from cancer. A friend of mine in the dorm was in my room when I got the call and I sat on my bed stunned. Perhaps that has been your response to sorrow. I could not say anything; I could barely breathe. After he waited a bit to see how I would respond, Mike invited me to go to the gym and play some basketball. I quickly agreed to go and off we went. We got into a game with some others, and I suddenly blew out my knee. My ACL ligament was torn and I fell to the ground in terrible pain. Suddenly, I burst into tears and uncontrollable weeping ensued. I'm sure the other guys on the court thought I was a big baby for sobbing over a knee injury, but my friend explained to everyone there I just found out my mom died. We all deal with sorrow differently and if you haven't experienced it, you will. Our world is tragic, and tragedy finds us. Our big idea today is regarding sorrow. When sorrow strikes, let it make you better, not bitter.

One of the greatest women in the Bible had a dubious past that haunted her. She had been possessed by demons until Jesus freed her of them and many believe she also had been a prostitute. Mary Magdalene became one of the most faithful and loyal followers of Jesus and when Christ was crucified, it devastated her. Unlike so many of Jesus' disciples who went into hiding when He was arrested, Mary Magdalene stayed with Jesus during His execution and then when the Sabbath was over, she went courageously to His tomb early Sunday morning to pay her last respects. Was Mary stunned by what she encountered there! The stone was rolled away, the body of Jesus was gone and two angels sat inside the tomb where Jesus' body had been. **...but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.** (John 20: 11-12 NIV) The sorrow of Mary Magdalene was so intense that even the sight of two angels did nothing to diminish her terrible grief. But then the angels got her attention. **They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"** (John 20: 13a NIV) Another way to translate their question is, "Woman, why do you keep weeping?" Now that is a strange response to such expected and reasonable sorrow. Yet clearly the angels did not think her sorrow was reasonable. That is why they questioned her reaction to the empty tomb. With every great tragedy, with each sorrow you face, like Mary, God always has something more in it that He has not revealed to you. In this case, Mary had not yet been told that Jesus was in fact alive, that He was risen from the dead and standing nearby. Most likely she would not have kept weeping if she knew that was the case. Let me state again the point here. With every sorrow you face, there is always something more in your sorrow that God has not yet shared and if He did, your sorrow might fade away.

Let me illustrate this point. Jacob, the patriarch, the father of the nation of Israel and the one for whom it is named, had twelve sons but one, Joseph, ten of the other sons hated. They sold Joseph into slavery and lied to their father Jacob about his fate. The brothers made it seem that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal and as proof they brought him Joseph's jacket, which they soaked in goat's blood. For nearly two decades, Jacob lived with the grief of his favorite son being dead, or so he thought. In the meantime, Joseph had, by the hand of God, been made second in command of all of Egypt. God had shown him in a dream Pharaoh had that seven years of bumper crops would be followed by seven years of terrifying famine. He was put in charge of the economy of Egypt, and he planned for the famine by storing the excess crops so the people would not starve. Only Joseph and the leaders of Egypt knew that the bountiful crops of the first seven years would end up in the middle east with the seven years of famine so only the Egyptians saved their extra crops in preparation. The result was of course that the people in the surrounding regions, including Jacob and his sons and their families, ran out of food due to the famine and were on the verge of starving. Word came to them that the Egyptians still had plenty of grain to sell so Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy food for them and bring it back. Jacob kept with him his youngest son Benjamin, whose mother was the favorite wife of Jacob, Rachel, the same wife who gave birth to the son Joseph who Jacob thought was dead. To add to the tragic nature of this for Jacob, Rachel had died when she gave birth to Benjamin and so this youngest of his original twelve boys was most precious to him and he would do nothing to put Benjamin's life at risk. The other ten brothers, when they got to Egypt, met with the official in charge of all the stored grain, and unbeknownst to them, it was their long lost brother Joseph. However, Joseph disguised himself and his brothers did not recognize him. To their shock, Joseph accused the brothers of being spies and demanded, if they were to return, that they bring their youngest brother Benjamin with them. He even held one of the brothers, Simeon, captive as a sign of how serious he was.

When the brothers returned, they told their father of the action the head of Egypt's food supplies had done with Simeon and his demand that if they wanted to get more food, Benjamin would have to go with them. Jacob refused to let Benjamin go with them because his sorrow was too great over the loss of Benjamin's mother Rachel and what he believed had happened to Benjamin's brother Joseph. It is fascinating to consider. Jacob would have been overjoyed to send Benjamin with his other sons if he had one more bit of information that Joseph was alive and well in Egypt. But not knowing that, Jacob made his view of sending Benjamin down to Egypt quite clear. **But Jacob said, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow."** (Genesis 42: 38 NIV) Jacob's terror at increasing his sorrow by risking the life of Benjamin was a great hindrance to him having joy that could swallow up his sorrow. He is not alone, many live with sorrow as the defining characteristic of their personality. As I noted before, in sorrow, there is always something more God has not revealed to you and in Jacob's case, it was that Joseph was alive. You have to be alert to God if you are to discover what that is which is missing from you knowing how to respond to what you face and what tragic events invade your life.

There is an axiom of the Kingdom of God that is rarely discussed or even acknowledged. In God's Kingdom, grief leads to joy. Let me show you what the Scripture has to say about sorrow and grief and see if you agree. **...weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.** (Psalm 30: 5b NIV) Where there is sorrow, rejoicing is around the corner. Jesus made this astounding commentary about sorrow. **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.** (Matthew 5: 4 NIV) His word choice in speaking on sorrow is not what one would expect. He says blessed, or more properly, "happy" are those who mourn. That surprising revelation begs the question, "Why?" Jesus tells us why. He insists that those who mourn will be comforted. The verb translated comforted is a form of the noun which is used throughout the New Testament to speak of the Holy Spirit. The idea is that whatever the Holy Spirit does in you is precisely what will happen when you face sorrow. God will supernaturally work in you so marvelously that you will be blessed, or in a way we can't grasp psychologically, be happy. The third verse that points to the joy which follows sorrow in God's Kingdom is this. **Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.** (Psalm 126: 5 NIV) The progression that is the way of life for God's people who walk by faith in Him is joy after sorrow. It is not a natural work built within human nature but a supernatural movement of God in the souls of His people.

There are actually two distinct benefits to sorrow. Paul shares the first. **Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret** (2 Corinthians 7: 10 NIV) Godly sorrow, sorrow grounded in the heart of one attached to God, brings about a longing to turn from all sin and follow Christ whole-heartedly. It builds rightness and holiness and for those wanting to live all out for Christ, sorrow is used by God to make that happen. The second benefit is that it improves the quality of your life, it upgrades you. **Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us.** (Ecclesiastes 7: 3 TLB) You will not reach your potential as a human being, let alone as a Christian following Christ without sorrow. God uses sorrow to perfect you, to qualify you for the sort of life He has in store for you. Many renounce sorrow as ruinous, as terrible but it is only terrible if you do not let sorrow work in you and refine your life.

Here are five responses to sorrow that will be crucial to you as you move forward. 1. Breathe. Let the sorrow roll through you as God works in your heart and transforms you. The sorrow may be horrific, even terrifying but give God time to work through your sorrow in you. 2. Shorten your priorities. You may need to cut down on your work schedule. Reduce the number of people you give your time. Sorrow is not something to sluff off with busyness. Take time to be alone with God and to process your sorrow. 3. Accept by faith God is with you. You are not alone, and God also is a man of sorrows and knows the pain of it. You may not be happy with God as sorrow rages inside you but at least believe the fact that He is with you and is going through it with you. 4. Be open to blessings. Some people when they go through sorrow shut themselves off to what God may provide them...a new job, a fresh start in a new location, a friendship that blossoms, a new way of seeing things that makes you a better person. 5. Hope for joy. You may be in great agony and joy may seem like a pipe dream but hold on to the hope that joy will find you and transform you. Our big idea may take some time to recognize but it is the mantra that will best see you through your sorrow. When sorrow strikes, let it make you better, not bitter. If you are not facing sorrow, see if God shows you someone who is and this week find a way to help that one in the sorrow and be that person's friend.