

God's Comfort in Grief

By John Thiel, [mp3](#)

Scripture reading: Isaiah 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he [was] wounded for our transgressions, [he was] bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

What is grieving? What does it mean to suffer grief? What actually is it in experience? The dictionary brings forth this definition: *an abject depravity of comfort and consolation*. This is what grief is. Nothing comforts you because the sensations that come across the chest, across the soul, are connected with something, someone that we have lost. Some internal ideal that gave us motive for living has been shattered in our experience. Your life support, that which has made your life worth living, has been shattered—that creates grief.

We want to come to terms with answers and a remedy to that internal anguish of soul. When people's loved ones have been separated from them by death, or by divorce, everything that they have had as their daily life has been removed from them, and it is a horrible experience; it is grief.

We have some examples of grief that we can refer to in order to understand the experience and identify ourselves with it. One of these is David's. He was very closely bound together with Saul's son, Jonathan.

How Are The Mighty Fallen!

At the death of his friend Jonathan, this is the grief that David expressed, his lamentation over the killing of Saul and Jonathan:

2 Samuel 1:17 And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: ... 19 The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!

The mighty have fallen; it is a terrible thing. Then he talks about his intimacy with Jonathan:

2 Samuel 1:25 How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, [thou wast] slain in thine high places. 26 I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was

wonderful, passing the love of women. 27 How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

It is interesting to see someone else grieving like that. But it doesn't affect you. It is just a description of someone grieving. However when something affects you and me personally, then we can begin to understand what is behind those words.

Not Better Than My Fathers...

Elijah also was grieving. He came to a point in his experience where everything that he had done in God's kingdom in proclaiming the message of God to the people of Israel, came to naught in his own mind. After he had seen such a tremendous power of God in bringing fire down and consuming his sacrifice upon Mount Carmel, he was now running for his life because of the threat of Jezebel; and here he is now:

1 Kings 19:4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die;

This was his grief—he didn't want to live anymore.

1 Kings 19:4 ...and [he] said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I [am] not better than my fathers.

"I am no better than my fathers." He saw himself as being a depraved sinner. As he was running for his life, after all the glory of God that had been shed about him, he was grieving.

Shattered Experience

The disciples also, after the death of Jesus, were grieving. When Jesus met them on the road to Emmaus, there they expressed to this Stranger by their side, "And we thought it was He who would save Israel, but it's all shattered." Everything that they had hoped for was shattered.

Luke 24:21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

"We trusted, said they, that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel from the Roman yoke; but it didn't happen. He's dead." What a grief.

Grievous Disappointment

The pioneers had expected Jesus to come—you want to read their grief. They expected Him to come on that date, October 22, 1844, and they waited right till twelve midnight, but nothing happened. Can you imagine how they felt? They had given everything up; they had even left their crops in the ground without harvesting them—it was all one big expectation, and now He didn't come. Just like the disciples, they were totally disappointed; they were totally *grieving*. Everything they hoped and lived for was shattered in their experience.

Sudden Death

There is one interesting example that pertains very closely to my own experience and to the experience of each one of us to a greater or lesser degree—it is the sad grieving that Sister White had to meet at the death of her husband. I can really identify with what she describes here:

It is sometimes hard for me to preserve a cheerful countenance when my heart is rent with anguish. But I would not permit my sorrow to cast a gloom upon all around me. Seasons of affliction and bereavement are often rendered more sorrowful and distressing than they should be, because it is customary to give ourselves up to mourning without restraint. By the help of Jesus, I determined to shun this evil; {2SM 267.4}

It's interesting; she calls this an evil to give myself over to this.

...but my resolution has been severely tested. {Ibid.}

Not to go about in a mournful way.

My husband's death was a heavy blow to me, more keenly felt because so sudden. As I saw the seal of death upon his countenance, my feelings were almost insupportable. {Ibid.}

I saw this very thing in my wife's death. *The seal of death upon her countenance.* It is terrible to see someone whom you love, alive in front of you, totally cognizant of their surroundings, and then they breathe the last breath and the last gasp, and death comes across the face. Sister White describes it there: *My feelings were almost insupportable.*

I longed to cry out in my anguish. {Ibid.}

That is grief.

But I knew that this could not save the life of my loved one, and I felt that it would be unchristian to give myself up to sorrow. {Ibid.}

Here we have examples of grief that you can actually touch and handle; you understand what this is. You know, when I think about Brother White's death, the thoughts that would have gone through her mind were similar thoughts that went through my mind and Rose's mind. "Why? Why is this happening?" Why did God permit James White to pass away before his normal time of life? It is a grief which needs answers. It needs to have something that actually biblically answers that grief. We have another example,

The Supreme Example of Grief

It is found in Jesus our Lord. As we sing it in the hymn, we want to see Jesus. In the following words we see Jesus in the supreme example of grief.

Matthew 26:37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. 38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

To be so sorrowful that your heart just about gives up. I have actually been through that over the past few days. If I permitted myself to go back and think about the detail, my heart was starting to squeeze; and it was sorrowful even unto death. Jesus met that. *Even unto death.* He became very heavy, there in Gethsemane.

His grief, as we read it below, was of such a nature that we can hardly comprehend; but it was for us. He was hanging on the cross there, and He was expressing His grief:

Matthew 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Jesus was grieving. That which was so precious to Him, His Father, the intimacy that He knew in the Godhead, was being shattered. He was grieving.

As we explore this experience of Jesus, we also read this description of His grief in Gethsemane and the circumstances:

The angels who did Christ's will in Heaven were anxious to comfort him; but it was beyond their power to alleviate his sorrow. {3SP 100.2}

I find these words so profound, because there were certain times when I wished I could alleviate Rose's sorrow; but you can't. The angels were trying to alleviate Jesus' sorrow, but they couldn't. An interesting mind exercise.

They had never felt the sins of a ruined world, and they beheld with astonishment the object of their adoration subject to a grief beyond all expression. {Ibid.}

Jesus suffered a grief *beyond all expression*.

Though the disciples had failed to sympathize with their Lord in the trying hour of his conflict, all Heaven was full of sympathy and waiting the result with painful interest. When it was finally determined, an angel was sent from the throne of God to minister unto the stricken Redeemer. {Ibid.}

Let us now pick up on this angel being sent to Him to administer to His anguish.

We can have but faint conceptions of the inexpressible anguish of God's dear Son in Gethsemane, as He realized His separation from His Father in consequence of bearing man's sin. {AG 169.4}

What sort of anguish? *Inexpressible* grief.

He became sin for the fallen race. The sense of the withdrawal of His Father's love pressed from His anguished soul these mournful words: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matthew 26:38). {Ibid.}

The divine Son of God was fainting, dying. The Father sent a messenger from His presence to strengthen the divine Sufferer and brace Him to tread the bloodstained path. Could mortals have viewed the amazement and the sorrow of the angelic host as they watched in silent grief the Father separating His beams of light, love, and glory from the beloved Son of His bosom, they would better understand how offensive sin is in His sight. {AG 169.5}

The angels were grieving too. There we see the supreme experience of grief in Jesus Christ. And as we read this, we have something to look at that will help us in our grief. You see, this experience is very well summarised in the following words of Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 15:18 Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, [which] refuseth to be healed?

That is grief. My wound refuses to be healed; it's a pain that won't go away. It is an anguish that if you try to stifle it, it only presses all the harder. It is an in-

curable situation that needs a remedy. And it is this remedy that we want to explore—a remedy for grieving, for this shattering loss of everything that has made life worth living.

Abundant Life

What does Jesus say to the grieving soul? He has come to do something. Here is the beginning of the answer from the Bible to our grieving:

John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have [it] more abundantly.

You can read this to mean that here on earth we're going to have an abundant life, freedom from grief; but that's not what it is talking about. We *will* go through grief on this planet. We are living in the place where Jesus came to suffer with us. But He said, While the enemy comes to kill and to destroy, I have come to give life, and that more abundantly. There is such a thing as being cured by an abundant giving of life; not a life that we see, but a life that is unseen. As the Bible says, *The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.* This is the life that Jesus came to give. He has given us abundance of life.

As we sing it in the hymn, *We would see Jesus.* And this is what we read now:

Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,

The angels are witnessing us, as they witnessed Christ;

Hebrews 12:1 ...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset [us], and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Grief can cause us to faint in our minds; but we see Jesus, looking to Him as the Author and Finisher of our faith, who endured the cross, suffering Gethsemane, suffering a grief which was indescribable. And as we do so, as we consider Him, we will not faint in our minds. There is a remedy for this wound which will not be healed in any other way. So we are called upon to look to Jesus for the relief of abject internal loss.

If in our ignorance we make missteps, the Saviour does not forsake us. We need never feel that we are alone. Angels are our companions. The Comforter that Christ promised to send in His name abides with us. In the way that leads to the City of God there are no difficulties which those who trust in Him may not overcome. There are no dangers which they may not escape. There is not a sorrow, not a grievance, not a human weakness, for which He has not provided a remedy. {MH 249.1}

Not a single one, including the grief that I am suffering at this time, and that we are all suffering to a greater or lesser degree.

The Ministry of Healing

None need abandon themselves to discouragement and despair. {MH 249.2}

None need abandon themselves to discouragement and despair, because Jesus has provided a remedy, if we will but take hold of Him in our experience. It is there in the presence of Jesus, in the knowledge of Jesus, that we receive a mind exercise that will *eclipse* the grief of loss. It will eclipse it.

To every stricken one, Jesus comes with the ministry of healing. {MB 12.1}

This ministry of healing is a beautiful experience when your heart is as Sister White described it in her case of grief.

The life of bereavement, pain, and suffering may be brightened by precious revealings of His presence. {Ibid.}

Precious revealings of His presence. O how many times I have had to help Rose in her experiences of suffering for those three months, to bring the sense of His presence to her, because she was severely grieving as well. The sense of His presence—this is what we need.

God would not have us remain pressed down by dumb sorrow, with sore and breaking hearts. He would have us look up and behold His dear face of love. The blessed Saviour stands by many whose eyes are so blinded by tears that they do not discern Him. {MB 12.2}

This is reality. When you are overwhelmed with negativities you can't discern Jesus. And I had to do this for my wife, to bring Jesus to her mind, because it is so overwhelming. To *discern Him*, to discern His dear face of love.

He longs to clasp our hands, to have us look to Him in simple faith, permitting Him to guide us. His heart is open to our griefs, our sorrows, and our trials. {Ibid.}

Can you see what is meant with these words after reading the grief that Jesus went through? *His heart is open to our griefs*, because He went through those very griefs in the fullest extent. So whatever grief I have, He met, and whatever grief you have, He met, and He suffered the whole lot. And it is this that He wants us to understand.

He has loved us with an everlasting love and with loving-kindness compassed us about. We may keep the heart stayed upon Him and meditate upon His loving-kindness all the day. He will lift the soul above the daily sorrow and perplexity, into a realm of peace. {Ibid.}

So that you are lifted above this internal grief, this wound that won't go away. I know this experience; it's a reality. It is gorgeous, it is precious. He will do just that; it's a reality.

So as we suffer under the memories and the loss and the sense that this is all a horrible dream that won't go away, we can actually experience what we have been reading here—what Jesus wants to do for us.

Feeling Our Griefs

Let us now come to the words of Lamentations, not just to know what is stated there, but to drink into the soul the revelations of these expressions of the Holy Spirit in the word. Here Jesus is speaking as He was suffering, and as we contemplate His grief:

Lamentations 1:12 [Is it] nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted [me] in the day of his fierce anger.

Our mind is here taken back to Gethsemane; and as we saw, it was an anguish. And the Lord is saying to us, “Look at Me; is it nothing to you what I am going through here? I am going through this so that you can see the answers to your questions ‘Why do I have to go through this grief? Why has this happened? Why is this taking place? Why am I losing something that is so precious to me?’” Jesus says, “If you would look at Me, you would see that everything that you go through on this earth I have felt. And it is not being removed; it is there. It is going to happen.” It is going to happen... and it *has* happened. The very thing I never wanted to happen happened. It happened! Why? Because we are living on Satan's enchanted ground; because the enemy has come in to kill. And He killed our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus let him do it, because he has done that to everyone else as well and will continue to do it. And we have to experience these things like Sister White losing her husband. It's an experi-

ence... but why, Lord? Because we are living in such a situation. We can't stop it; it happens. And the words come, But, Lord, can't You stop it? No; the Lord doesn't stop it. He only helps us to go through it with His presence. He came and died and suffered grief, and He says, "Is it nothing to you? I am doing it for you to be able to cope, to be able to find the relief."

As I am sharing this message to you, it's a precious comfort to me. I am able to rejoice in the midst of all this grief because of this that I am sharing with you; and I pray that we can all embrace it with great comfort and joy. The description of grief is enlarged in those words:

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs,

What has He borne? *Our* griefs. So in other words, I will meet my griefs, but He has borne them. It's beautiful.

Isaiah 53:4 ...and [he hath] carried our sorrows: yet [in the midst of that, we didn't understand what was going on, and like the unbeliever in the time of Christ,] we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he [was] wounded for our transgressions, [he was] bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

A wound that can't be healed *can* be healed because Jesus came so close and met your and my experience. And as I was trying to encourage Rose, I had to encourage myself as I saw the features of death come upon the face. It was something that only God can help us to deal with in the beauty of what He has given us here. So I could calmly say to her, *Goodbye, we will see you again.*

But the ugly picture of this death upon the face is something that, if I give myself over to it, I won't enjoy what God has given me as an answer. However as I keep my eyes on Jesus, it is a release from the grief. It's a comfort! It's a strange experience. I have dealt with this subject before, but now I experience it more than at any other time in the past. I know it is real. And I pray that we can embrace this picture of Jesus, that we need not abandon ourselves to discouragement and despair. To *abandon myself* to it means that I am thinking about it and I keep on thinking about it and it keeps on playing on my mind and it keeps on burdening me, and it is a wound that won't heal because I am actually abandoning myself to it. I am permitting it to fester inside of me, instead of thinking of what we have just contemplated about Jesus here.

Let us learn a lesson of courage and fortitude from the last interview of Christ with His apostles. They were about to be separated. Our Saviour was entering the bloodstained path which would lead Him to Calvary. Never was

scene more trying than that through which He was soon to pass. The apostles had heard the words of Christ foretelling His sufferings and death, and their hearts were heavy with sorrow, their minds distracted with doubt and fear. Yet there were no loud outcries; there was no abandonment of grief. Those last solemn, momentous hours were spent by our Saviour in speaking words of comfort and assurance to His disciples, and then all united in a hymn of praise. {2SM 268.1}

Would you have it? They *all united in a hymn of praise...* Yes!

The heart may be sorrowful, the mind may be distracted with doubt and fear; but we keep on listening to the words of Jesus, and He gives us the skill for handling that grief and releasing ourselves from its total abandonment. This is what Jesus said; *I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.* A strange paradox—in the midst of the suffering an abundance of life. I know it to be true. It is bewildering to the natural mind to be really happy although you've lost a very precious soul. But it is really true. It can be done. We need to open our hearts to Him who has opened His heart to us. To understand the atonement of Jesus, to understand Him really being one with me where I am—that is precious.

Dear afflicted ones, so sadly bereaved, God has not left you to be the sport of Satan's temptations. Let your sorrowful hearts be opened to receive the words of consolation from your pitying Redeemer. Jesus loves you. Receive the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness and be comforted. Thank Him who has risen from the dead, and who ever liveth to make intercession for you. {2SM 272.2}

There it is: He suffered with us, and we are in Him, and we will rise together with Him. We will look forward to seeing our dear sister again, as she has trusted Him right to the very end. Through all the sufferings and temptations she held on to Jesus.

Jesus Christ is a living Saviour. He is not in Joseph's new tomb. He is risen, He is risen! Rejoice, even in this your day of sorrow and bereavement, that you have a Saviour who sympathizes with all your grief. He wept at the grave of Lazarus, and identifies His sorrows with those of the sorrowing children. {Ibid.}

As my heart absorbs these realities we have pondered here, there is healing deep inside; there is comfort that is precious. It's a weird experience—I can actually look at the picture of my wife and not fall apart, but rather rejoice. It is a weird experience, but it is something God provides for us.

Let us, then, open our hearts to Him, according to what we have seen through this message; and the knowledge we have of the nature of Christ is the secret of breaking through every dark spot in our life. May God grant us truly never to abandon ourselves to grief, never to succumb to grief and to remain in a state of grieving. No; it doesn't have to be.

May God bless us, that we will be comforted in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Amen.