



Social Issues and Action Newsletter August 2018

Loss, Grief and Hope



As I think about human needs in our community, and listen to people, I realise that so many folk suffer silently from grief. Christians we have special insight into loss and grief. What is our witness in a community where all experience grief at some point? Here are some thoughts on grief and hope.

Loss.

Not so long ago while washing my clothes I realised that I had left my rings, including my engagement ring, in the pocket of my trousers. To make matters worse it was a front loader machine so I could not retrieve them till the cycle was finished. Finally the wash was completed and I anxiously pulled my trousers from the machine. I managed to locate two of my rings in the pocket, but there was no engagement ring. I was devastated. It was nowhere to be seen in the machine. It was not just the loss of the ring but of all the memories attached to it.* I grieved.

Grief

Loss is at the heart of grief. Even when we move house, there is the loss of friends, familiar places and sometimes independence. Any significant change can create grief. I had lost a ring. Imagine our grief at the loss of all our memory-laden possessions in fire or flood! How do we feel when dreams are shattered with loss of expectation such as failure of marriage or disappointment with children, as well as illness, disability or infertility?

Naturally, grief enfolds us with the death of a spouse, a child or close family members, not least when we experience traumatic, sudden, permanent separation caused by accident or natural disasters. We can be engulfed with such a deep and abiding sense of loss that we wonder how we will ever recover.

Grief is normal and will affect us all. It impacts our mind, our body and our behaviour. But at the same time it is different for each of us. It will take time for us to work through as we learn to survive. For us as Christians, part of that process involves listening to the questions that our heart raises, and seeking answers in the word of God.

I've experienced shattered dreams when I knew my first grandchild was to die and I was completely helpless to make things better which is what mothers do. I was filled with consuming sadness. Every morning I woke with an ache in my heart. It seemed unbelievable and yet it was real. As I struggled with sleep, anxiety often seemed to engulf me. That grief has never entirely left me.

How does being a Christian help me in the midst of such pain?

Hope

Grief is a necessary friend. How can we not grieve separation? Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. The Bible assumes that we grieve, but that our grief is different: ‘we don’t grieve like the rest, who have no hope.’ (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

I remember thinking, how can this be? I suppose as I have thought more about it, and read the Bible, especially Romans 8, some important truths have given me light and hope. Let me share them with you.

First of all, we know even for Christians, life will not be easy and free from suffering.

Second, God is still in control. A verse that really helped me in the midst of pain, indeed one of the most precious verses in the Bible, is verse 28: *‘For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.’* What does this mean? It gives us a fundamental belief which undergirds how we perceive life, the decisions we make, what we think about the world, money, marriage, death, and how we grieve. Even in our darkest moments we know God is there. It does not always feel as though God is in charge, but as Job asked, ‘Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?’ (Job 2:10).

What struck me too, is that God has his good purposes. We may not be able to see why something has happened. But the God who is control who is a good God who loves us. We may trust his purposes. The things which happen will be used for good. While we sleep, God is still in charge of the world and his wisdom and power are far beyond our imagining.

Two other things I learned. The first is that God is a God of promises and second that he is a God of love.

God’s promises give us hope. God is in charge of history and he tells us that when Jesus returns there will be a new heavens and a new earth filled with righteousness. Can you trust his promises?

Well we can trust his promises because his love for those who love him is sure. Can anything or anyone separate us from the love of God? Troubles, hardships, evil, persecutions, death are powerful forces. Continuing to trust God in the

face of any of these is daunting. But nothing can separate us from the love of God.

And so, what about the hope we have as Christians when we grieve?

None of us knows what life's circumstances will bring us. Some of us will have or will experience great suffering, loss and grief, and feel far from God but God has given us hope. When we're with the Lord forever, there will be no more pain, death, mourning, crying or pain. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:3,4).

All around us there are those who suffer from grief without hope. As we gently and personally testify to Christ, we have a message that faces the reality of grief, but enables us to live with grief through sustaining hope. It is worth sharing the message that we ourselves walk with a God of love whose promises are sure.

** You will be pleased to know that I found my engagement ring when the machine was pulled apart. I felt like the woman in the parable Jesus told of 'The Lost Coin'. (Luke 15:8-10)*

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Some helpful resources

<http://www.hammond.com.au/services/resources>

