

Grief and the Goodness of God

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Preacher: Pastor Ken

[0 : 00] Well, I will be honest with you. I do not have a text of Scripture for you to turn to today.

It is not because I am abandoning the Bible for anything that I could possibly bring to you that would be better. But it's just because there's no one passage of Scripture that I'm alluding to in what I wanted to share with you this morning.

And what I'm sharing with you this morning is going to be a little bit of a different delivery than what you may be used to. Usually we read a text, we break it down, and go our merry way through the text that way and let the Holy Spirit direct and convict us.

This morning is going to be a little more pointed. I felt a couple weeks ago particularly drawn to, now what do I want to share on Memorial Day? There was the going through the Book of Acts, continuing our study in Acts, and that would have been good.

Normally I don't let days, special days during the year dictate what I preach from in the Bible. And Memorial Day is no exception. I don't usually make it about Memorial Day by any stretch.

[1 : 15] But I felt just drawn to this topic of grief. And it's not because I was experiencing any particular grief in my own life, but I guess because I've known so many people recently who've been experiencing and going through their own grief.

And so I just wanted to tackle this topic of grief and the goodness of God as it relates to our Memorial Day gathering. And Memorial Day did play a part this time in preparation.

So we're in the midst of Memorial Day weekend. Memorial Day is a day where men and women who died while serving the U.S. military are honored.

It was originally known as Decoration Day, originating in the years following the Civil War, and ultimately became a federal holiday in 1971. Many Americans observe Memorial Day by visiting cemeteries or memorials, holding family gatherings, participating in parades, remembering friends and loved ones that have died in the course of battle in service to our country.

And while some common aspects of Memorial Day have crept in over the years, for instance, having cookouts and celebration with the start of summer, and going to the beach or whatever you do to go enjoy this day and typically the weather that is accompanying it, like today, we cannot forget that our freedom to enjoy such luxury was bought with a high price, the ultimate price of people giving their lives in service of our country.

[3 : 02] I'd like to just pray on that moment right now. Dear Lord, thank you for the opportunity to gather this morning and worship you.

Thank you for the freedom we have in this country to do so, knowing that millions of Christians around the world do not have such freedom. Thank you for the men and women who have served faithfully in our military and have laid down their lives by serving our country.

We've been richly blessed here in the United States, Lord. Help us not to forget these men and women. Help us not to forget what it costs to get to where we're at today.

In Jesus' name, amen. While a majority of people have thoughts of gratitude and thankfulness on Memorial Day, there are others where Memorial Day conjures up feelings of grief and sadness.

The children of men and women who died in battle and did not get to know their mom and dad may reflect with sadness and grief. Spouses whose loved ones went off to fight not realizing it would be the last time that they would see them.

[4 : 13] Women who were pregnant while their husband was killed, when their husband was killed, leaving them to grieve his death and raise their child. And combat veterans who lost friends and fellow soldiers in battle.

All these, and I'm sure others that I did not think of, experiencing grief and heartache and sadness on a day like Memorial Day. Well-intentioned to honor the veterans who gave their lives, but also

realizing that there are stories behind those names, behind those lives that were given. And that's the very real situation for many people at this time of year. And it brings to light a reality that we'd much rather forget. And the reality is the occurrence of grief. That grief is, it's normal. We all experience it. It's an all-consuming, universal human experience that takes many forms. Parents grieve a child whose life is cut short. Children grieve a parent whose memory fades. Childless couples grieve what could have been and may never be. The ill and elderly grieve losing health and independence. [5 : 24] And if we're not the ones grieving, we're an onlooker to someone else's grief. Grief, it's a natural response to pain and loss.

But it's not just a human response to a difficult situation. Because we see from Scripture that grief serves a purpose. In Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 2, the preacher writes, it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.

For this is the end of all mankind and the living will lay it to heart. A funeral is not usually a time of rejoicing or celebration.

More often than not, it's full of mourners. People who attend a funeral, they're mourning the loss of a loved one, a friend, it could be a co-worker.

I've been, or I've had classmates who passed away before I graduated high school. And so it's not typically a time to gather and celebrate and enjoy that occasion.

[6 : 35] And as Solomon's alluding to in Ecclesiastes, it's typically at a funeral that a person is more likely to get refreshed on the perspective of life. That's why he says it's better to go to a house of mourning than go to a house of feasting.

It's better to go to a funeral than to a party. And that goes, that's contrary to our human, you know, thought. Like, why in the world would that be the case?

A funeral is sad and an occasion for sadness and a party is an occasion for celebration and enjoying food and loud music. Well, at a funeral, in Ecclesiastes here, you're going to think about this, at a funeral, a person observes the mourners.

They can see how impactful a life the person who had passed led. That's one thing I was kind of, I don't want to say caught by surprise, but was, I did yesterday as I was at the visiting hours for Don. I knew almost nobody there, but I was just, I was intrigued and was wowed by how many people were there because of the life that he led and the impact he had on so many.

[7 : 52] So when you go to a funeral, you go to visiting hours, you see that, you observe that just by the amount of people, it can be the volume of people that show up. as you hear how the deceased is spoken of, they can find out what was important to them.

I can find out what's important to somebody by going to a funeral. I did a funeral several months ago for somebody that I'm connected with, friends with, and his mom had passed away.

I'd met his mom a couple times but didn't really know her other than she was not a Christian. His family are not Christians, so I was intrigued that he had asked me to do a funeral for her.

And I had to do it at a Methodist church in Massachusetts. That was, okay, fine. But as I was there, when I was there, basically I gave the gospel.

It was pretty much my task. I said, Lord, may you be glorified through this time. And so to be there with the family. But as they got up and they shared and they shared stories and they gave their accounts of her life and what she did and how it impacted them, I learned a lot about her in that short period of time.

[9 : 06] By the pictures that were up, that they had posted all around, by the words that were spoken, the stories that were told, what they were, you know, the inside jokes that I still did not understand but understood that there was something special.

And that's the thing, too, looking at pictures. You know, you can see how people were involved in other people's lives, what was important to them, what they enjoyed doing. I have a feeling I could go out on a limb.

Again, I didn't know Don hardly at all. I met him twice in my entire life. I'm going to go out on a limb and say that Don liked cars. And he liked working on them, probably.

I can tell you, there were like a million pictures of cars and there were like car memorabilia things around, trucks and older vehicles, like true vehicles and cars, right?

But these are things that you observe, you see, and you go to a house of mourning, you go to a funeral and you observe these things and as a result of this observation, the person who's doing the

observations, myself in this case, left wondering how will my funeral go?

[10:16] What will people say or think of me? does my life reflect more of me and less of Jesus? Now these are things that I concern myself about and at a funeral that's the opportunity for that reflection to kind of come out like what are people going to say about me?

Nine times out of ten people don't hear what other people think about them in their life and everyone else gets to hear about it after they die. So what are people going to say about me? I wonder. And maybe you wonder too. I'm hoping good things and I'm hoping it gives glory to God because that ought to be our purpose in what we seek to do.

Not only does grief serve a purpose in our lives, we can rest assured that grief has its purpose in this regard. but it also has its limit. In Psalm 30 verse 5, weeping may tarry for the night but joy comes with the morning.

There are some moments when all language can feel wholly uninspired and it can feel lifeless and incredibly deficient at addressing emotional anguish in the aftermath of a tragedy.

[11:40] but we can be sure that that grief, that pain, that sorrow only needs to last a certain amount of time.

Now that time may be different for people across the board. Grief may be around for a couple of days, a couple of weeks, a couple of months, a couple of years and for some people a lifetime. You might say, well, then at that case, grief never had its time. Actually, it did because when you die earthly death, you don't just stop in existence.

So yes, you had that grief for the entirety of your earthly life maybe, but beyond that, especially if you're a believer, you're not going to have to worry about that grief anymore.

And we'll get to that as we wrap things up. But words often fail to comfort people who are encountering insurmountable loss. And the one reason why, and there's one reason why, is that there, yeah, there is one reason why there must be an outpouring of grief because we cannot handle it.

[12:58] We can get overwhelmed. We can think about it too much. And we hold it in, right? People hold in their grief, their sorrow. They try to put on a face of, yeah, I'm doing good.

And how are you doing? Oh, I'm good. I'm fine. I'm great. And in reality, they're just being torn to pieces inside. See, we should never seek to hold in our grief and pain from loss.

Rather, we need to be honest about our emotions. And I want to just take a second and say this, being honest about your emotions doesn't necessarily mean the conclusions that you come to because of your emotions are true.

Does that make sense? Like, we can be in such despair. Like, people who are in despair and insurmountable loss may believe that God doesn't love them.

That God doesn't care about them or that God's not in control of things. All these conclusions would be absolutely false and wrong. Because they're, but it doesn't negate the fact that these are still feelings that are felt and thoughts that come about to those feelings.

[14:11] Think about Naomi in the book of Ruth, chapter 1, verse 20 and 21. As she comes back, she said to them, Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? Notice that she doesn't attempt to sweep life's challenges aside and convince everyone that everything was fine.

She's very honest about it, about her bitterness and about her pain. Consider also David in Psalm 13, verses 1 through 3. How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. The writing of this psalm, he's in such despair, feeling as if God has turned his back, as if God has shut himself up towards David.

[15:26] Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? Or consider Psalm 88, verses 1 through 3. O Lord, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.

Let my prayer come before you. Incline your ear to my cry, for my soul is full of troubles and my life draws near to Sheol. This is just two passages in the Psalms.

David felt forgotten, he felt betrayed, alone, completely disregarded, and he let God know it. He didn't hold back. No, it's not like he went on a full-on relentless, you know, like, anger, tirade towards God.

That would be something, it would be a different type of conversation we'd be having. Because at that point, wouldn't be talking about grief. But what he does, he's honest, he's God, I really feel forgotten about.

I feel like you're not even paying attention to me. I feel all alone. Like, you don't even care about my situation and what I'm going through. Be honest.

[16:43] More than half the Psalms see the writer pouring out his soul to God in moments of great grief and suffering and adversity. I mean, how much adversity did David face in his life?

And a lot of those Psalms are written during those times. So the Bible gives us ample space to voice our grief, to pour out our pain.

Look at Mary and Martha in John 11. They poured out their grief to Jesus. Martha said to Jesus in verse 21, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

And in verse 32, Mary, later on, came to where Jesus was and saw him. She fell at his feet, saying, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. God, do you hear me?

Do you see what is going on? Do you understand the pain and sorrow that I'm going through? You know the story well. Jesus was off in another area.

[17:50] He was preaching. He was ministering. And the news came to him. You know, hey, Lazarus isn't well. You need to get over there. He said, yeah, we'll get there. And he takes his time.

Two days later, he finally decides to leave. And by the time he gets to Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for a few days already.

And there's sorrow and grief. And they recognize, Lord, if you had been here, he would not have died. There's a popular saying among Christians and non-Christians alike.

God will not give you more than you can handle. I think I've harped on this once or twice before. I'm going to bring it up again. That saying is not biblical, and it cannot be any further from the truth.

That saying, I believe, has its origination from Mother Teresa, I think. At least that's the last source that I'd heard or read about. But that's so far from the truth.

[19:00] I mean, consider what the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1.8. He said, we do not want you to become unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia, for we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

God won't give you more than you can handle? Paul was utterly burdened to the point of despairing for his life beyond his strength.

We need to be honest about grief. We need to be honest about these things and not put out little pithy sayings to try to make people feel better or to get them through a hard time. To say that God won't give you more than you can handle is an absolute lie.

Well-intentioned lie, but a lie nonetheless. And it's because of that statement that people who do get overwhelmed and to the point of it being more than they can handle start to get angry at God.

I was told you would never give me more than I could handle. And this is way more than I can handle. So there's honesty here from one of the greatest missionaries in church history.

[20:21] Arguably one of the greatest theologians in church history. One thing that's made quite clear, God repeatedly gives us far more than we can handle.

It happens often. That he gives us more than we can take on and that we can endure in our own strength. But it's not because he likes to see us suffer.

It's not because he likes to see us in pain. It's so that we are inclined to fall on him and to call on him and to cling to him all the more.

I've mentioned many, many times over the last 12 months or so that God brings trials into our lives. God allows things to happen in our lives for a purpose and a reason.

And ultimately, the great purpose that we see in Romans 8 is that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ. And we start to be conformed to the image of Christ through the trials that we endure and what we go through and what we lean on him for.

[21:33] So what about the overcoming of grief? Grief can be conquered. So if you'll notice in your bulletin, this is the third point and there's a lot of verses.

How can we go about overcoming the grief that grips us in life? Well, first, as has already been alluded to, we must express it to God.

If there's one thing that is clear from the Psalms, it's that we must be honest about our feelings and share them with God. But why? He knows.

He understands. He's all-knowing. Well, we do. We express our feelings of pain and loss because he does understand us.

Think about Psalm 139, verse 2. You know when I sit down and when I rise up, you discern my thoughts from afar. God understands us. He gets us.

[22 : 33] So he's, oh, he gets us. Yeah, yeah, he does. Because he discerns our thoughts from afar.

And he understands our grief. We express our feelings of pain and loss to God because he is in control. Going back to Ruth 1, 20 and 21, but you see I've underlined some major, highlighted major things here that Naomi was saying.

She said to them, not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty.

Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? Naomi acknowledges God's hand at work.

She declares that God is right in the midst of her pain. She's gone through famine, loss, bereavement, doubts, goodbyes. But because she knew God as the Almighty, she could leave the explanation and responsibility for such bitter trials to him.

[23 : 49] In the midst of her trials, Naomi could not have known what was to come. When she left Bethlehem, there was famine. When she returned, there was harvest.

Through the clouds of grief, the light of hope begins to break as the stage was set for God to provide abundantly for Naomi and for Ruth.

Think about that. She left Bethlehem, there was a famine. It was bad. And then she lost her husband and she lost her sons. And now she's going back, she was a broken woman.

But it was through that trial and through that brokenness and through that grief that God was setting the stage for a great provision for her, for Ruth, and ultimately for us.

When God is at work, even hopelessness may be the doorway to fresh starts and new opportunities. When something doesn't go right, when something is lost completely to you, or something happens that kind of upends your plans, what is God showing you?

[25 : 04] What is He going to show you? What is He preparing you for? Are you prepared for Him to do a work that you're not expecting? And finally, we express our feelings of pain and loss to God because He will bear our burdens.

Matthew 11, verse 28, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. The promise of rest, the promise that He's going to bear our burdens, the promise to bring it to Him and we gain something, a relief.

1 Peter 5, verses 6 and 7, humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.

humble yourself before God and cast all your anxieties and pain and sorrows and griefs on Him and He will take them on because He cares for you.

So voicing your grief to God is not only biblically legitimate but spiritually and emotionally healthy. It's a good thing to do. You and I were not created to bear the incredible weight of life's griefs.

[26 : 19] We were not created to bear them. Not only must we express our grief to God but we must also express it to others. Galatians 6, verse 2, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

The body of Christ is designed to ease the burdens of an individual spiritual. And it's done so by fellow members in the body of Christ.

And fellow members who believers have the ability to carry this out in ways that unbelievers do not have. I want to make that very clear. The body of Christ is unique in that we have something to offer that unbelievers do not have.

See, we can be a listening ear as well as an active voice to point the grieving person back to God. Romans 12, verses 15 and 16, rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty but associate with the lowly, never be wise in your own sight.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. And don't be haughty, don't think more highly of yourself, associate with the lowly.

[27 : 45] Maybe you think what somebody's going through or maybe the individual you don't think very highly of, weep with them, rejoice with them. Don't be wise in your own sight, point them to God.

Often the grieving individual tends to shun others. They push them out, they don't want to hear it, they don't want to talk about the grief, it's too painful to talk about, it's too much to bring back up, I don't want to deal with it again, or I don't want to, I just want it to go away.

And so they'll push people away, they don't want the support, and so they isolate themselves, and that just increases the isolation, that increases the misery that they experience and that they go through.

And so the book of Job, obviously I could have gone there, right? If you're going to talk about grief, go to Job, that makes sense. But there's a lot that's not right in the book of Job as far as advice given by friends and thoughts by Job himself.

Ultimately Job, I feel, it's like you get the great benefit from Job by reading it in its entirety. But if you wanted like the Sparks Note version, read chapters 1 and 2 and chapter 41, or 42, whatever the last chapter there is in Job, and you got it.

[29 : 03] But one thing Job's friends got right was when they went to be with him in his morning. Job chapter 2, verses 11 through 13 up on the screen.

They made an appointment together. That's interesting. They didn't just randomly show up. They knew what he'd been going through.

He lost everything. Literally everything. Money, prestige, children, health, the respect of his wife. He's lost everything. They understood what he was going through. So they made an appointment together to come and show him sympathy and comfort him.

And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. That's how physically in pain and poor health he was.

[30 : 04] And they raised their voices and wept. And they tore their robes and they sprinkled dust on their heads toward the heavens. They wept with those who weep.

And they sat with him on the ground. They didn't just, they didn't bring the comfy chairs out to sit, you know, hey, we're going to sit here while you're there on the ground.

Nope. They sat with him. They joined him right where he was at. Seven days and seven nights. And the most amazing phrase of it all, no one spoke a word to him.

For they saw that his suffering was very great. There are times, a little transparency here, when I don't know what to say with somebody who's in grief.

And it's a hard spot to be in because the thought can be, well, you're the pastor. You should know what to say.

[31 : 16] You should have the word to say that's going to right the situation. And I'm telling you, when I'm going somewhere, to a hospital, to a home, wherever I'm going to counsel and to be with somebody, on the way, I am praying, Lord, help me because I do not know what to say.

I do not know the words to say. I do not know the scripture to bring them to. And sometimes, there's been the occasion where it's, I'm just there. And the most I might get out is, we're praying for you.

And that's all I can say because I don't know what to say. And you know what? That's okay.

Sometimes not having an answer for life's troubles, it's okay. Sometimes there are no words.

Sometimes silence is the answer. Sometimes it's just being there, right? Let's say, you don't have to say anything. Sometimes there is nothing to say.

And just being there makes all the difference. And it's in those moments of silence that the gospel can speak to us. It's in those moments of silence that God, through his spirit, can encourage a grieving individual.

[32 : 29] I think about 1 Thessalonians 4, 13, and 14. We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. You understand that we're, that fallen asleep is died.

dead, like they're not sleeping, they are dead, as we'd understand it. But this text doesn't say that we shouldn't grieve, just that we should grieve differently than those who have no hope.

Let's say that I don't know Jesus, and I believe there is no further existence after death. You know anyone like that?

Yeah, I think so. I think we could all say yeah. So I don't know Jesus. I don't believe there's any further existence after death than if my wife dies.

[33 : 39] She is really lost to me. Every single thing that makes Bonnie who she is and who she was, I should say, is gone forever.

Everything that I know, her loving care, her humor, her consideration of others, it's gone. Never to be recuperated.

That grief is a black hole for somebody who is there. But for those who are in Christ, we're promised a great hope beyond this world. John 14, verses 1 through 3, let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

Jesus promises to come again for those who believe in him. That he has a, that we're going to be brought to a place where we will dwell with him forever.

[35 : 03] And in the end, there will be no more pain. There will be no more sorrow. There will be no more tears. That grief that we have had to endure, that grief that has been with us for a time, as I said, it's limited.

Especially for those who are in Christ, there's a point, even if that grief, whatever the sorrow is in life, is with you every day for the rest of your earthly life, when you die and you're before the Lord, that grief is no longer there, it is gone.

It is behind you. It has had its time. I don't know what grief you might be going through or what grief you might have day in and day out.

Some of you I do know, some of you I don't know. But just remember the promise that Jesus has said. He is preparing a place for us and he will bring us there with him.

Revelation 21, 4. In the end, the new heavens, the new earth, the new Jerusalem, all things are made new. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more.

[36 : 24] Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away. Let's pray. Let's pray.

I thank you, Lord, for this time to reflect on this topic of grief. Oh, the sorrow that we experience in this world and in our lives and especially those who don't know you, Lord, whose sorrow is literally a black hole to them.

I pray, Lord, that they would come to know your grace and your mercy and your peace. That they would know the hope that is in Jesus. And, Lord, I thank you that though we go through a hard time, we go through trials and hardships, Lord.

You want us to pour out our heart and our feelings to you. Lord, that you want us to share with our brothers and sisters in Christ, that they may be a light to us, that they'd be a listening ear, they'd be an active voice to point us back to your grace and mercy.

And, Lord, we thank you that we look forward to the day where there will be no more tears, there will be no more sorrow, there will be no more pain, because the former things will have passed away.

[37 : 54] And for that we give thanks. We thank you, Lord, that in the midst of grief, you are good. And it is your goodness that brings us through and gives us hope.

May we cling to it and not forget. In Jesus' name, amen.