

When a Loved One Dies

Death comes to every family. There is no way to avoid it. Good doctors, excellent Care of one's self and prayer to God may delay it. But it still comes. Death strikes the rich family the same as the poor . . . the powerful the same as The Weak . . . and the religious the same as the unreligious. The Bible says, "It is appointed unto man once to die" ([Hebrews 9:27](#)). But the fact that everyone experiences the pain of losing a loved one in death does not in any way lessen the horrible pain we feel when our own friend or family member dies. Then it is no longer an academic study, it is reality. The emptiness that churns inside us is impossible to explain to another person. We don't even fully understand it ourselves. But others who have lost loved ones feel with you and know much of what you are going through.

In the Gospel account of John there is a record of a friend of Jesus dying and The reaction of his family, as well as the teachings and actions of Jesus toward them. Would you read it along with me? "Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.' When Jesus heard that, he said, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it' Now Jesus loved

Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again: The disciples said to Him, 'Rabbi, lately, the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him: These things He said, and after that He said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up: Then His disciples said, 'Lord, if he sleeps he will get well: However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for believe. Nevertheless let us go to him: Then Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with Him: So when that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Then Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You: Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again: Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day: Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me though

he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, the world.’ And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, ‘The Teacher has come and is calling for you. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the house, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, ‘She is going to the tomb to weep there.’ Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, ‘Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died: Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see: Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved Him?’ and some of them said, ‘Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?’ Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said. ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, ‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days. Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’ Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank You that You

have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me: Now when He had said these things He cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Loose him and let him go:’”

(1) There Are Normal Emotions When a Loved One Dies

Sometimes when we go through the loss of a friend or family member in death, we feel guilty about some of the things we think and feel. If we could just know that what we feel is normal and that there isn't anything wrong with it, it can be helpful. These two sisters loved the Lord deeply. Yet when their brother died they felt as if He had let them down. Both of them said to Jesus, “Lord, If You had been here, my brother would not have died:’ It is natural for us to feel let down, to feel as if the Lord has turned His back on us and rejected our prayers. Almost every time someone dies, a loved one is praying for their recovery.

I certainly don't know why we can sometimes pray for one to get well and the ydo and another time pray with the same earnestness for another and they continue to deteriorate until they die. Yet I also know that the fact that one dies does not mean that God has turned His back or that He no longer loves the person or their family. God loves us all more than we can ever understand (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8). In this

story of Lazarus death, please notice the emphasis placed on how much Jesus loved both him and his sisters. As a matter of fact, The Holy Spirit tied His delay in going, to His love for them. Look again at verses 5-6, “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.”

I also know that if God intervened every time we ask Him to, then no one would ever die. But the very best of Christians feel rejected and forsaken by God when death hits their family. So if anger, even toward God has arisen in your heart, know that you are not alone.

(2) Openly Express What You Feel

An important point to be seen from these sisters who felt so hurt when their Brother died is that they were honest with themselves and with God about their feelings. They went directly to the Lord to say, “Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died:’ It is one thing to tell other people how we feel. It is another to go to God with it. God has never been offended because people were honest about their feelings. The cure to their hurts came from Jesus. Our greatest mistake when a loved one dies is to allow our hurts to drive a wedge between us and the Lord. Instead of telling Him how we feel, so often people just

stop talking to the Lord, when they are deeply hurt. If we allow this to happen to us we are avoiding the very one who has the power to understand and to come to our aid, in our hurts.

Notice also, that it is wise to talk to someone else about our feelings. All of us need a trusted friend to whom we can open our very souls and know they will understand. Sometimes we need people just to listen, without any judgment and without any correction or rebuke. When we are deeply hurt we often feel and want to say things that, intellectually, we know aren't correct, but they are the way we feel at that moment anyway. If possible find a friend to whom you can talk freely, without fear and express the things that flood your very soul.

In the expression of them you will often find answers for yourself. Any wound needs to be opened and cleansed to heal correctly. I've often found it useful, when feelings ran deep and I just didn't seem to be able to pour those emotions and thoughts out to anyone else, to write them down. In the keeping of a journal of some kind, we often can look back in days to come and see when the healing process began to take place for us

(3) Hold On To Your Faith

Did you notice in reading John 11 how many times Jesus asked Martha about Her faith? When our faith is shaken by the death of a dear one, it is often the case that some of our past answers to all of life's problems don't seem to fit anymore. In such times it is awfully

easy to lose our hold on our faith. So many religious people want to handle every problem by simply stating, “It’s the Lord’s will.” That is fine as long as the hurt is someone else’s. But when it is my Loved one that has died an untimely death, cut off in the very prime of life, perhaps even at the hands of someone living in sin, it is terribly hard to believe that such is the will of the Lord. Actually, death is the Lord’s enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). It is the tool of Satan. If anyone is to blame it is the devil in hell, not the God of heaven.

One of the key things said about Job, when Satan began his assault against him, by murdering his children and destroying his fortune, was that Job “Sinned not, nor did he charge God foolishly” (Job 1:22). I’m afraid that many, in trying to comfort people at the death of a friend have done the very thing Job avoided and have charged God foolishly, by saying “It’s the Lord’s will” or “God took them” or some other equally foolish statement. Believing such often drives us away from the God who can help to ease the pains of loss.

When a loved one dies, it will help if we allow the loss to lead us closer to God than ever before. Spend time reading and studying the Bible. Meditate on the word. Pray often for help. Assemble with Christians for encouragement. While none of these offer an immediate cure, they are among the very best sources of relief.

(4) LEAVE THE JUDGING TO GOD

One suggestion that might be helpful when considering the death of a loved one is, leave the judging to God. He knows all things, even the deepest thoughts of the person who died. Sometimes God regards people as righteous whom we would have quickly consigned to hell. Be careful. We aren't equipped to judge the destiny of anyone. Think of the example of Lot, Abraham's nephew. He was taken in by Abraham when his father died, evidently. But when both the men grew wealthy and confusion arose between the herdsmen of Lot and those of Abraham, it was Abraham who said, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren." It was Abraham who gave Lot the choice that he could select any land he wanted and Abraham would go the other way. Lot selfishly chose the very best land. Lot in time drew nearer and nearer the city of Sodom until he became a full citizen. When God sent angels to get him and his family out of Sodom before He destroyed it due to its extreme wickedness, the men of Sodom gathered as a mob around Lot's home and wanted the angels to commit immorality with them. Lot offered them his daughters instead. Lot's sons-in-law thought of him as a mocker when he told them that Sodom would be destroyed. Lot's wife disobeyed God and became a pillar of salt. Even after getting out of Sodom, his daughters got Lot drunk and committed incest with him.

Now if you were judging this man, what would you think of his destiny? It may surprise you to see God's assessment of Lot. In **2 Peter 2:7, 8** after telling of Sodom's destruction the Holy Spirit led

Peter to say, “And delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day-to-day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds):’ God saw things in Lot most of the world could never have seen. He declared him righteous.”

David, the king of Israel, was guilty of adultery, murder and lying. Yet God said he was a man after His own heart. When someone has died it is to no avail for us to spend our time thinking about their destiny. There is not one thing we can do, at that point, to change it. And God does not need our help to make a decision about their relationship with Him. Instead of spending time thinking of the dead one’s destiny, wouldn’t it be better to spend time making certain our own lives are in harmony with God’s will and on helping those around us who are still alive and can change to be right?

(5) REMEMBER THIS LIFE IS NOT THE END

When comforting Mary and Martha, Jesus reminded them that He is the resurrection and the life and that Lazarus would be raised from the dead. While our loved ones won’t be raised immediately, as Lazarus was. There is coming a day in which “All who are in their graves will come forth” (John 5:38-29). In **1 Corinthians 15:20-26** the Bible says: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by

Man also came the resurrection of the dead. **FOR AS IN ADAM ALL DIE, EVEN SO IN CHRIST ALL SHALL BE MADE ALIVE.** But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death:'

Besides the promise of the resurrection of the body, the Bible also promises that the soul or spirit of man goes on to reward between death and the resurrection. In **2 Corinthians 5:1-8** we read: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord:' Later, in Revelation chapter seven God pictures people between death and the resurrection and Christ is shepherding them, leading them by

everlasting fountains of water and God is wiping all tears from their eyes. (**Verses 9-17**)

Beyond all this, are the marvelous descriptions of heaven in Revelations chapters 21 and 22. It will certainly temper our sorrow to think of a loved one being in the presence of God, enjoying the wonders of that heavenly home.

(6) THINK OF OTHERS

When we are hurting deeply ourselves, it is terribly easy to forget that others are hurting in the same way. For example, when a father dies, it is easy for children in their pain to not think about how much mother is hurting. But even more often, when one dies, we tend not to realize how much the young children hurt. Added to their pain is the lack of understanding and the lack of anyone to talk to. Because you cry when the subject is brought up, often the child suffers silently. Their tears are often shed where no one sees. And their thoughts often are a long, long way from reality.

In your hurt, realize that you can still help another to heal and that when you do you always help yourself. Talk to the children. Be honest. Allow them to express their feelings. Hold them close and try hard to understand what it would be like if you were in their place.

In reality, one of the first signs that one is beginning to heal from the terrible pains of losing a loved one is when they begin to think of others.

(7) PRAY

Prayer helps. Pray honestly, openly and lovingly to the God who is always there. “The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers” (1 Peter 3:12). I know that at times we feel like there is no one who will listen and that no one really cares. But, almost always there is someone near us who really cares about us and our feelings. They may not know how to express themselves or what needs to be said, but they care anyway. But remember, whether people care or not, God does! We can “Cast all our cares on Him for He cares for us” (1 Peter 5:7). He is never too busy to listen. And He never needs to leave before we are ready for Him to. “He will never leave us nor forsake us” (Hebrews 13:5-6). Your prayers to Him don’t always need to be formal ones in which you stop everything and bow before Him. You can talk to God as you lie down, as you walk along the way, as you see things that remind you of the loved ones who has now died or any other time. The prayer can be out loud or a silent whisper that only you and God could ever hear. But, you see, understands and He will help.

(8) LISTEN TO GOD

While it is important to talk to God, it is just as important that we listen to Him. There are so many comforting passages in the Bible that can really help when we hurt, if we will listen to them. Some of them, you've known all your life. The beautiful 23rd Psalm. Perhaps you can still say it from memory. It holds a powerful message of comfort. Other great texts to help us when we don't know what to do are: Psalms one; Psalms 8; John 14:1-6; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 4:16-18; 5:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-58; 2 Timothy 4:6-8 and Revelation chapters 21 and 22.

In truth, the Bible is literally filled with verses that rush to our aid and offer comfort and encouragement in our hurts. Make it a habit daily to read and meditate on its truths and it will help you to grow through your pains.

(9) GIVE YOURSELF TIME

When you go through a major physical illness or injury, it takes time to heal. Even after the wound has been cleaned and bandaged, with all the proper medicine applied, there is no immediate cure. Wounds heal. But not over night. Time is one of the absolute necessities for healing.

Exactly the same thing is true when the hurt is to our heart and emotions, with the loss of a loved one. Healing comes. But time is your ally. Don't rush the healing process. Allow yourself to grow through the hurts.

Welcome the memories. But also allow yourself to begin to heal. New life will begin to come, if you will let it. One day, you will be able to remember the loved one without it hurting so badly. But you must open yourself up to the new growth that is available to you.

It is my hope that the thoughts in this lesson will help, in some way, to relieve the hurts. Please know that God cares and so do the people who your brothers and sisters in Christ.

God's Plan for Man's Salvation