

Family Seasons: Lesson 9

Times Of Loss

Memory Text: “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

Setting The Stage: I read an amazing story not long ago about a 14-year-old named Nick Springer. He was attending a summer camp in western Massachusetts having a fun-filled time, when not long into his experience he contracted meningococcal (man-in-go-kok-al) meningitis. The infection in his bloodstream rapidly cut off the vital circulation of blood, beginning with his hands and feet. When his kidneys shut down, Nick was placed on dialysis. With only a 10 percent chance of survival, Nick’s parents were preparing to say goodbye to their son.

For two months he was kept in a medically induced coma. During this time, surgeons were forced to partially amputate Nick’s arms and legs to stop the advancing gangrene from spreading to the rest of his body. Seventeen surgeries later, when Nick awoke from his coma, his right forearm ended at midpoint, his left arm ended a few inches below the elbow, and both his legs ended above the knees. Nick lost a lot fighting the infection, but one thing he didn’t lose was his life. In fact, Nick had to lose something in order to gain life.

Loss; the Result of Sin: We all experience loss in one way or another. Loss is a part of the challenging reality we call life. If you think about it loss is really a result of sin. The moment Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they experienced their first loss, the loss of innocence. Shortly after the Fall, they witnessed loss of life when the first animal sacrifice was offered. They also lost their perfect garden home, and years later they lost their son, Abel, at the hands of his brother, Cain. In the end, one of them lost their spouse, and finally the surviving partner lost his or her own life.

So many losses came as a result of one decision. We all know the reality and pain of loss, and most of us feel it the deepest when loss strikes the family. In the family we have our closest bonds; thus, loss there hits us the hardest.

We know that loss comes in all shapes and sizes. The SS lesson highlights the inevitable loss of health, the tragic loss of trust, the loss of freedom, and the loss of a loved one. There are other losses we experience too. Sadly, loss is a part of life. But the day is coming when we won’t experience loss anymore. One fine day there will be no more sin, no more death, no more disease, no more loss. I suspect we’ll experience a bit of culture shock when we get to heaven, but that’s a culture shock I’m willing to put up with, how about you?

Sunday - Thursday

The great composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) lived much of his life in fear of deafness. He was concerned because he felt the sense of hearing was essential to creating music of lasting value. When Beethoven discovered that the thing he feared most was coming rapidly upon him, he was deeply troubled. He consulted doctors and tried every possible remedy, but the deafness increased until at last all hearing was gone.

Beethoven finally found the strength he needed to go on despite his great loss. To everyone's amazement, he wrote some of his grandest music after he became totally deaf. With all distractions shut out, melodies flooded in on him as fast as his pen could write them down. His deafness became a great asset. Sometimes loss can bring gain if we don't let it overwhelm us.

When William Sangster (20th Century English preacher) was told he was dying of progressive muscular atrophy, he made four resolutions and faithfully kept them: 1) I will never complain; 2) I will keep the home bright; 3) I will count my blessings; 4) I will try to turn it to gain.

How could William Sangster make such a resolution? We struggle with how to get a handle on our own loss, which brings discouragement, loneliness, grief, and pain. How can we be resolved like William Sangster to turn loss into gain?

Blame seems like a great place to start for many. "It's all your fault! If you hadn't... then I wouldn't..." Then there's denial. "I'm okay. Everything is fine..." We can get angry and hold onto the bitterness, but that doesn't work too well either.

How do we walk in the rain? *(remember being a kid and playing in the rain, but that changed as you got older?...) Only when we've learned to walk in the rain can we hold an umbrella for someone else when they walk in the rain. Only when, by the grace of God, we've made it through our struggle will we be resourceful enough to help others through their time of grief or pain.*

2 Corinthians 1:3, 4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

Here are some things we can do when we can't control the torrential down pour in our lives that will help us handle walking in the rain of loss:

I. Lean on God's promises (2 Peter 1:4). There are many things you can break when you lean on them, but you can't break God's promises. Someone estimated that there are 3,573 promises in the Bible. That's a lot of promises. The first promise of the Bible speaks to our salvation (Gen. 3:15). The last promise speaks to Christ's return (Rev. 22:20).

Need - But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19)

Discouragement - "The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles." (Psalms 34:17)

Fear - "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Joshua 1:9)

Guidance - "What man is he that feareth the LORD? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose." (Psalms 25:12)

Patience/Endurance - "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

II. Rest in Jesus love (1 Peter 5:7) This is a matter of faith. You don't need to ever question God's love. It's as sure as the sun that shines in the sky and your heart that beats in your chest. When everything else has failed you and let you down, Jesus never will. You don't need to panic, even though you want to. You don't need to "lose it," even though you're about to. The best remedy is to resign every concern, every trouble, every pain, and every grief to God's wise and loving determination.

III. Remember, God performs all things for His people (Ps. 57:2). In every thing that befalls us we should see and know the hand of God. Whatever God performs concerning His people, it will appear, in the end, to have been performed for them and for their benefit. Though God is the Most High God, He condescends so low that all things work for my good. This is a good reason why we should, in all our difficulties, cry unto him; not only pray, but pray earnestly.

IV. Heal by helping (1 Thess. 2:19) "There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up." (John Holmes) "The best antidote I know for worry is work. The best cure for weariness is the challenge of helping someone who is even more tired. One of the great ironies of life is this: he or she who serves almost always benefits more than he or she who is served."

V. Surround yourself with supportive people (Heb. 10:24, 25). Misery loves company, and that's why you need to be with those who care more about you than about what you think of them if they were to tell you the truth.

You don't need friends like the one I read about: Two men were out hunting in the northern United States. Suddenly one yelled and the other looked up to see a grizzly charging them. The first started to frantically put on his tennis shoes and his friend anxiously asked, "What are you doing? Don't you know you can't outrun a grizzly

bear?" His friend responded, "I don't have to outrun a grizzly. I just have to outrun you!"

VI. Make an attitude adjustment (Rom. 8:18). Take a scale. On one side you put the light afflictions of this time, only these few short years. Then on the other side you put all that eye has not see, nor ear heard, neither entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for those who love Him. And when you do that you will realize that the light afflictions aren't worthy to be compared with what God's got coming.

VII. Change your food to improve your mood (3 John 2). "There's one thing to be said for a diet--it certainly does improve your appetite." But of course we're not talking about adjusting your intake (although that might not be a bad idea for some), but changing the type of food you eat. Less high calorie little nutrient foods, and more fresh, "live" foods. Less high fat, high cholesterol foods, and more high fiber foods. Eating what God originally gave us promotes good health and improved brain function. Rather than relying on a quick caffeine or sugar pick-me-up, drink water or have a piece of fresh fruit.

VIII. Let loss alert you to start or stop doing something (Gen. 37 & 39:1-6). Joseph felt discouraged, unloved, and lonely when he went down to Egypt. However, it was during his most trying experience that he resolved to not let feelings dictate his life, but instead let God have his very best. And what a changed life it was!

Do these things and you should start to feel the warm rays of sunshine pierce through those dark rain clouds above.

Isaiah 43:2, 3: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you...For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." (Isa. 43:2, 3)