

## Sadness and Lamentations

**(Job 3:1-10 NIV) “1 ¶ After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2 He said: 3 "May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’ 4 That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. 5 May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light. 6 That night—may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months. 7 May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it. 8 May those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan. 9 May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn, 10 for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes.”**

Do sadness and the expression of sadness or sorrow have a place in our life? How should disciples of Jesus Christ deal with such profound emotions?

Most of us have heard what happened to Job. The first 2 chapters give us the setting of the book. One day, the angels came before the Lord and Satan came with them. God attracted Satan’s attention to Job, a man who was upright, blameless, and man who feared God and shun evil.

Satan challenged God and told him that Job was faithful because he was highly blessed. He told him, in other words, if you take everything from him, his possessions and his health and he will curse you to your face. Job will not turn towards you but against you. God permitted Satan to physically harm Job. He was not allowed to touch his life however.

Job had 10 kids, 7 sons and 3 daughters. He was a very rich man with incredible riches. He also enjoyed good health and a very good life.

He lost everything, all his kids, his possessions and his health. As we read his story, his wife turned against him and encouraged him “to curse God and die”.

Then we read his lament, his profound sadness. As I read this chapter, I asked myself, how should I respond to Job if I had been in his presence? The answer would have been to simply listen with an open and compassion heart, keep from judging and condemning and to simply validate his suffering not trying to take away or to add to it.

There is much good in our world but there is also evil, an evil that we don’t understand fully. We see it but it is difficult to explain. The Bible calls the “mystery of lawlessness” in the NRSV, “the secret power of lawlessness” in the NIV and “the mystery of iniquity” in the KJV. It presents itself in all kinds of ways:

- In sicknesses of all kinds both physical and mental;
- In conflicts and war;

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- In broken relationships – broken families, broken marriages, broken friendships, broken work relationships, broken relationships between neighbours, broken relationships between religions, broken relationships between peoples whether it be languages, skin color ....
- It presents itself ultimately in death and its deadly weapon or sting which is sin.

Where do we start to make a little sense of this sadness that from time to time overwhelms us and washes our whole being like a huge wave?

We need to begin with God and who God is. We know that God is one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is a self-sacrificing God. He is other-affirming and community building in love. God is in a loving eternal relationship of beautiful interdependence, distinctness and otherness. When one member or a person in the Triune God is involved, the other two are involved also. We read about it in so many places in the Bible. The Father so loved the world that He sent His only Son (John 3). When Jesus was baptized the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. **(Mt 3:16-17 NIV) “16 As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.””**

God is also the Creator but He is involved in creation. Jesus became incarnated, came in the flesh to redeem us and to rescue us. He submitted Himself to the evil in human beings and died under our hands. He submitted Himself to death to conquer death for us.

God is directly involves in our world because He sustains all of it. Jesus is the one who holds it all together. **(Col 1:15-17 NIV) “15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”**

We know who God is through the Self-revelation of Jesus Christ.

How to do we know who we are? We cannot know it outside of who we are in in relationship to God.

We know that we are:

1. Created in the image of God;
2. We are sinners who deny and distort our created being;
3. We are forgiven, enabled by God’s grace to begin a new life anew in faith, to serve as Christ’s disciples in love, to move in hope toward the promised fulfilment of life in the coming reign of God. (From Faith Seeking Understanding by Daniel L. Migliore, p. 139).

“We are mystery to ourselves. We are rational and irrational, civilized and savage, capable of deep friendship and murderous hostility, free and in bondage, the pinnacle of creation and its greatest danger.” (Idem p. 139)

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Being who we are, living in a broken world, there is suffering. There is suffering that doesn't show in broken limbs and broken bones. There is suffering that we can't capture on a CT-scan or CAT scan. Although invisible, we know it is there.

Job felt it after he lost everything. He had a profound sadness in his heart which affected all his thinking.

The background of the word emotion is interesting

Emotion comes from the Latin word "emovere" which means "move out, remove, agitate." (From <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=emotion>)

Various emotions push us to do different things. Anger for example drives us to defend ourselves, to try to control a situation or person.

Fear causes us to withdraw, to avoid or if it is extreme to attack.

How does sadness move us? Let's look at Job.

It causes profound pain

1. With a deep wish that we would not have to face a particular situation; **"May the day of my birth perish".**

Totally overwhelmed: **"Why did I not perish at birth? Vs. 11**

2. A wish to die: **(Job 3:20-21 NIV) "20 ¶ "Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, 21 to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure,"**
3. Deep questioning: **(Job 3:23 NIV) "Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?"**
4. Strong feelings and emotions that overwhelm our thought: **"For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water." (Job 3:24 NIV) "I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil." (Job 3:26 NIV)**

One thing that we notice about Job's deep sadness and lament is that God never condemns him for it. Job also entrusted his life to God. Although he wished to die, he did not entertain taking things in his own hands and ending his life.

We live in a world that gives the impression that we ought to be happy all the time or which denies this deep sadness. We have television programs that give the impression that sex without attachment doesn't cause consequences – no babies, no STD's and no hurt feelings, etc...

We have people witnessing or experiencing horrendous murders, explosion, tragedies, etc... At the end of the show, there appears to be no sequence. The heroes go on with life with no after effects at all. It is not a real world. Real life is very different.

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Take the example of Nicholas Wolterstorff who lost his son Eric. He was only 25 years old when he fell to his death while mountain climbing by himself. Eric was a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ. He died unexpectedly. In his book, *Lament for a Son*, his father writes on page 13:

WE TOOK him too much for granted. Perhaps we all take each other too much for granted. The routines of life distract us; our own pursuits make us oblivious; our anxieties and sorrows, unmindful. The beauties of the familiar go unremarked. We do not treasure each other enough.

He was a gift to us for twenty-five years. When the gift was finally snatched away, I realized how great it was. Then I could not tell him. An outpouring of letters arrived, many expressing appreciation for Eric. They all made me weep again: each word of praise a stab of loss.

How can I be thankful, in his gone-ness, for what he was? I find I am. But the pain of the no more outweighs the gratitude of the once *was*. Will it always be so?

I didn't know how much I loved him until he was gone.

Is love like that?

These are God given feelings and emotions. God did not abandon this man and he did not abandon Job for saying things in his pain that appear at times to be irrational.

We need to remember that God is not an uninvolved God in our lives. He is not distant. He accompanies us in our mourning and suffering. God is touched. (Ex 34:6-7 NIV) **“6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’”**

We see this attitude in Jesus Christ. (Mt 9:35-36 NIV) **“35 ¶ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”**

This is the heart of God towards people.

(Mt 23:37 NIV) **“‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.’”**

God is touched by our suffering. He suffers because we suffer. He indwells in us and we indwell in Him while being totally separate and “other” from Him.

In His grace, he accompanies us in the depths of our affliction. (Ps 139:6-8 NIV) **“6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. 7 ¶ Where can I go from your**

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**Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths (Sheol NRSV), you are there.”**

We need to remember that in our suffering, we are not abandoned. Elie Wiesel, a concentration camp survivor, wrote a book called “Night”. In it, he recounts the incident of a young boy who was hanged in front of all the other prisoners for a minor infraction. As the body of the young boy was hanging on the rope, someone asked him, “Where is God now?” A voice within him replied, “Where is He? He is – hanging here on this gallows....” (Faith Seeking Understanding p. 121)

God is at work. He is in the process of redeeming not only humanity but the whole universe! All people are sustained by Jesus Christ. All people are forgiven. The only question and response on our part is, “Will we accept the forgiveness and the love that God has for us?”

Does that mean that we will not suffer? As Christians, we are not spared from suffering. No one is. We are not spared from what others may do to us. I am often profoundly touched when I see couples in my office in the process of ending their marriages. If a husband or wife decides to leave the other for whatever reason, the other spouse and the children go through profound emotional pain. They live all kinds of emotions from anger, to disappointment, to profound mistrust, to insecurities of all sorts. The spouse who leaves is not spared from suffering, because we are all interconnected. We are affected by the suffering of others. Why would it be otherwise? We are created in God’s image who lives in a community of perfect love totally affirming of the others in the mystery and the greatness of the triune God.

(From Lament For A Son, p. 97 by Nicholas Wolterstorff) SUFFERING MAY DO us good—may be a blessing, something to be thankful for. This I have learned.

Ordinarily we think of the powerful and wealthy as blessed; they enjoy the "good things of life." But maybe the little ones, the downtrodden peoples and assaulted persons, are blessed as well. I do not mean that they will be compensated for their sufferings. I mean that perhaps the treading down is itself a blessing, or can become a blessing, rich as any coming to those we call "the lucky ones."

Suffering is the shout of "No" by one's whole existence to that over which one suffers—the shout of "No" by nerves and gut and gland and heart to pain, to death, to injustice, to depression, to hunger, to humiliation, to bondage, to abandonment. And sometimes, when the cry is intense, there emerges a radiance which elsewhere seldom appears: a glow of courage, of love, of insight, of selflessness, of faith. In that radiance we see best what humanity was meant to be.

That the radiance which emerges from acquaintance with grief is a blessing to others is familiar, though perplexing: How can we treasure the radiance while struggling against what brought it about? How can we thank God for suffering's yield while asking for its removal?

But what I have learned is something stranger still: Suffering may be among the sufferer's blessings. I think of a former colleague who, upon recovering from a heart attack, remarked that he would not have missed it for the life of him.

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In the valley of suffering, despair and bitterness are brewed. But there also character is made. The valley of suffering is the vale of soul-making.

But now things slip and slide around. How do I tell my blessings? For what do I give thanks and for what do I lament? Am I sometimes to sorrow over my delight and sometimes to delight over my sorrow? And how do I sustain my "No" to my son's early death while accepting with gratitude the opportunity offered of becoming what otherwise I could never be?

How do I receive my suffering as blessing while repulsing the obscene thought that God jiggled the mountain to make me better?

Deep sorrow is a profound subject but also a reality that we all experience in our lives from time to time. We will all experience it.

As we read the book of Job and as we meditate and think about the subject of suffering, we need to understand the following:

- Wisdom is ultimately found in God alone;
- Human wisdom on its own cannot fathom and comprehend the ways of God;
- Underserved suffering has no easy answer;
- God is not obligated to explain all things to human beings; (God did not explain to Job why he suffered).

The fear of the Lord is the path to true wisdom.

Losses, death, etc... happen to all of us. Profound sadness will be our experience from time to time. We will lament. The good news is that God is able to hear us and continue to love us.

The good news is that God loved Job and still does. God loves all the world because He did not send His Son to condemn the world but to save the world. Through trusting in His faithfulness we have eternal life. The good news is also that men and women can and do go through profound sadness and still keep faithful to God. He is our hope. He is our answer. He is our life.

At the end of it all, Job said:

**"1 ¶ Then Job replied to the LORD: 2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. 3 [You asked,] 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 4 ["You said,] 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' 5**

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**My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:1-6 NIV)**

Job admitted to his distorted and limited view of God. God is so much greater than our thoughts, our words. We need to let Him touch us, guide us and teach us even in our suffering, even in the depth of our misunderstanding. We can't do this on our own but He is always there to comfort us through the Holy Spirit, even in the midst of suffering and sadness.