

## GRIEF

Last week I wrote about grief and how sorrow affects us, but I didn't touch how God uses our grief to help us grow. I was 12 when I first experienced grief. I didn't just experience loss, but I experienced heart breaking sorrow. My older brother died on my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was faraway when he died in Panama. He had joined the army on his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was despondent when he left but we wrote to each other and he wrote me encouraging letters urging me to stay in school, get an education, take care of myself, and become what he would want me to be, a moral educated person with a purpose in life and to be better than what others thought of me. I read those letters every once in a while, and have come to see they were written by not just a brother but more like a parent urging me to remain true to what he wanted for my life. He had always been my protector, my confidant, the person who I was sure of and trusted. When we received word that he had died from kidney disease it was like the world as I knew it had ended. I was alone. I was sent off to live on a farm the next day with some friends and the friend had only one rule, I was not to cry. Thus began my odyssey with grief. I was with them for what seemed like a very long time, about a month, and every night I cried silently into my pillow. I was sure this was some kind of cruel mistake, God who I knew to be vengeful, and without a heart surely would not take my brother from me. I prayed nightly for death. I realized later that I had sunk into a depression that would last for two years. I became sick one night and could not lift my head. I was pleased that I was dying but, in the morning, I awoke and found myself still in the same bed, but my neck didn't hurt as much. My neck felt better but I was alive and disappointed at that. As I began to weep because I was not dead a voice that sounded like my brother spoke to me and it said, "God wants you to live." I had polio. It was a mild case and I got through it although I would use it for high school to get out of gym class. I went from an A student to D's and missed school. I missed a lot of school. Finally in 8<sup>th</sup> grade I was informed that I would not pass into 9<sup>th</sup> grade and would have to remain in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. My Mother went to the school and talked to the teacher I most hated and it was determined that I would be passed on condition that my grades and attendance become better. The teacher I most hated talked to me and asked me what I wanted to do with my life, and I suddenly realized I had a choice. The teacher I most hated was the one who began my journey to lift myself up. 9<sup>th</sup> grade was better, and my grades improved. I went once again to being an A student and by 10 and 11<sup>th</sup> grade my marks were excellent. My perception of God eased, and I wanted to learn more about this God who took the person I loved most from me and when I was 15, I went to church and began to learn that God wasn't vengeful or evil and had taken my brother home when his body failed him. God loves each of us and has plans for us but sometimes we fail, or our bodies fail, and God weeps for the life lost too soon just as we do. Those we love never truly leave us, and we grieve for the lives lost and there will always be an empty chair at the table, but God is with us, and we are comforted by knowing that he holds our loved ones in his arms. Thanks be to God for the time we had them in our lives.

Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me by still waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Lord, we thank you for the day you have given us. May we this day follow your precepts to live in kindness, to do good in all things and to honor you. Be with those who grieve, comfort them. Be with those who suffer illness and restore their bodies. Be with our church, may it be your church doing good for those in need and those without hope. Be with our Pastor and bless his ministry. Be with his family grant them good health and blessings. Be with our staff and leaders, grant them mercy and lead them. Lord, may we be the hands and feet of Christ here in this place. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

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