

GOING THROUGH A LOT OF LOSS

I received a phone call this past Sunday night that left me feeling sadness and shock. When the number appeared on my phone, I did not recognize who the caller was. When I answered, the person shared who they were and which church from my past I knew them from. They proceeded to tell me that a dear friend and colleague of mine in ministry had died earlier that day. I was shocked to say the least. I had no idea that my friend had been suffering from any health issues. The caller filled me in on my friend's declining health over the past few years and the incident that led to her sudden death.

My thoughts quickly turned to my dear friend's daughter. She is in her mid-twenties. This is not the first death this young woman has experienced. Her father died suddenly when she was a teenager from a farming accident. Then her brother and only sibling died when he was still in high school. Now she is experiencing the death of her last immediate family member. My heart was breaking for her as I was still processing all that had happened. I attended her brother's funeral and was so impressed at this young woman's strength and resilience. As soon as I got off the phone, I could not help but take a moment and pray for this young woman facing loss again in her life.

Unfortunately, it can be a reality in some people's lives to experience much loss in a short period of time. One of the realities when we experience grief and loss is that, at some point, we may begin to question certain aspects of our faith. This was the case with Job after he experienced significant losses in his life.

We are told in the opening chapter of the book of Job how he was a man of complete integrity, who respected God and stayed away from evil. Despite living his life in such a positive way, Job still experienced suffering and loss. He not only suffered financial loss but experienced the sudden death of his children after a powerful wind caused their house to collapse. Job did not blame God for this loss at the time, but some of his friends implied that his suffering was a result of some sin in his life. After listening to his friends' thoughts, Job began to lose his perspective of God for a short time as seen in these words:

Why is life given to those with no future, those God has surrounded with difficulties? I cannot eat for sighing; my groans pour out like water. What I have always feared has happened to me. What I dreaded has come true. I have no peace, no quietness. I have no rest; only trouble. (Job 3:23-26)

Whether it was a result of listening to his friend's thoughts, or whether he was struggling with his own ideas about the reasons for suffering, Job began to lose proper perspective of God's love for him. We too may find our thoughts of God in the midst of loss and suffering begin to change our perspective of His love. During times in our lives when we experience incredible loss and suffering, it will force us to go back to the basics of faith and decide whether we blame God or trust and draw strength from Him. What can help us to make the right decision to lean into God and walk in faith in our moments of loss is to remember as Paul writes that nothing can ever separate us from God's love.

And I am convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Confirmations of God's incredible love for us, hopefully will help us draw our strength from Him in our times of loss rather than to blame Him and walk away. This is the decision Job eventually made, and this is what I saw on display in my friend's daughter in her previous loss when it came to her brother. I was so impressed by the resilience and strength displayed by this young woman as she gave the eulogy for her brother. Having been raised by a Christian mother and instilled with faith from an early age, even as she faces another loss in her life, it will not surprise me to see at Friday's funeral for her mother this same kind of resiliency knowing nothing can separate her from God's love.

I am greatly appreciative for the dear friend and colleague God placed in my life. She was a great source of friendship and help to both Nadine and I in my early years of ministry. We all experience losses like this in our lives. May these times be a reminder to us of the importance of keeping a proper perspective of God especially in times of incredible loss so we can lean on Him for strength and support.

Keep safe and God bless,

Pastor Dean