

God Loves Us Too Much To...

Various Scripture

Loss is a fact of life. Everyone deals with losses of one kind or another from minor ones like getting on the wrong bus and missing an anticipated lunch with a friend to the tragedies we have recently experienced in our FCBC family.

All loss whether minor or major results in pain and where there is pain there is grief. It is unavoidable and may last a few moments, few months, a few years, or a life-time.

I have experienced and dealt with a wide variety of losses both in my career as a pastor and in my personal life. Today I want to share with you some of the lessons I have learned about God when dealing with significant losses.

The first lesson I learned is this: Freaking out is okay! When we hear certain words like “heart surgery,” “foreclosure,” “terrible accident,” or “cancer,” when we are told that a loved one has died, we lose control, we freak out.

Freaking out will be different for everyone. It might include screaming and yelling, weeping and wailing, or fainting and falling.

Some people will be very vocal and others very quiet. The shock may leave us feeling as though we can't breathe, can't think, can't comprehend. Our hearts may be filled with cold, clammy, heart-stopping fear or pain.

No matter what form our freaking out takes we can trust in the God who created us and formed us, in the God who says:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³ For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

God is not afraid of or repulsed by our reactions. God loves us too much to let a little thing like freaking out get in the way of our relationship.

The second lesson I have learned is this: God will not abandon us when we ask hard questions. Let’s face it, life doesn’t make sense when tragedy strikes. There is no logic, no rhyme or reason.

In our humanness we often respond by asking hard questions. Why? Why is this happening?

Why is it happening to me?

Why is it happening now?

Why, why, why...why did my spouse walk out on me?

Why did my loved one die?

Why did I lose my job?

Why didn’t I get that promotion?

Why was my baby born with mental illness?

And then there is the really hard one: “God, where are you?”

I suspect all of us have asked God this question at one time or another and maybe on more than one occasion.

The reality is that there are times in our lives when we feel abandoned by God; when we cannot see God’s hand or feel God’s presence in our lives.

There may be periods of time when we feel so alone it physically hurts. At those times we might even question God’s existence.

Praying might be impossible – no words or thoughts will form. There may only be a sense of fear and dread or a cold feeling of aloneness.

In our clearer moments we may know that we are in good company when we experience those feelings. 16th century priest and poet, St. John of the Cross, called this experience “the dark night of the soul.”

It is something that many people of great faith have experienced – people like Moses, King David, Elijah, and in more recent times, Mother Theresa to name just a few.

God loves us too much to let a little thing like hard questions get in the way of our relationship.

The third lesson I learned is this: in the midst of tragedy we sometimes have to look very carefully to see God at work, in fact, sometimes it is impossible to see God’s activities until much later.

Because it disrupted my life for almost a year it took a long time before I could see God in the timing of my cancer diagnosis. Here is what happened.

While on a 3 week leave between churches, I decided to follow up on a medical problem I had been having and made an appointment with my local doctor.

As we were talking she looked through my file and mentioned that it had been a long time since I had had a mammogram and suggested that it might be a good idea for me to have one while I was in town.

So, with great grace (eyes rolling and a grimace) I said, “oh, good idea but I am leaving in a couple of weeks so I don’t know if I will have time.”

Her response was to write an order for a mammogram that I could take with me so that I could have one done once I was settled in my new job. “Great,” I was thinking, “I won’t have to do it for a while yet!”

The doctor went on to say that I needed a bone density test as well and could make an appointment while I was at the clinic. So I went off to the Imaging Department to make an appointment.

I handed the doctors order to the scheduler who looked up at me and said, "I see you also need a mammogram.

You are in luck, we just happen to have back-to-back appointments and you can get it all done at the same time. Isn't that great?"

Once again with all grace I could muster I said, "Yeah, great."

I came this close to not having the mammogram which revealed an aggressive form of breast cancer.

The "coincidence" of those two appointments being available, one right after the other while I was in town sure seemed like a God thing to me a few months down the road.

God is with us whether we notice or not, whether we can see God's activity or not! God loves us too much to let a little thing like blindness get in the way of our relationship.

Another lesson I have learned is that the quality of our prayers doesn't matter.

We can be crying, articulate, talking crazy or not talking at all. In the wake of tragedy, we may find ourselves unable to formulate a prayer. Yet God will hear the cries of our heart and provide comfort.

There might be times when we stomp around mumbling and grumbling under our breath, shaking our fist at or yelling at God. Other days we will be articulate and focused on God, able to express our prayers in beautiful ways.

We will find ourselves saying prayers of gratitude, maybe praying a Scripture like Ps. 103 which starts out with these words,

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name" and ends with:

"Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do God's bidding, obedient to God's spoken word. Bless

the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers that do God's will. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

God is with us in our prayer times no matter how good or bad our prayers sound. God loves us too much to let a little thing like the quality or lack thereof of our prayer to get in the way of our relationship.

Another lesson I have learned is this: God speaks to us in many ways as we journey through the days, weeks and months following a tragedy. God can speak to us through cards and notes.

Cards and notes that will arrive at just the right time and speak just the right words. Depending on the situation they may be serious or generate a much-needed laugh.

On days we are feeling overwhelmed we may receive one that says ""Don't be frightened by the size of the task"" on the front and quotes 1 Chronicles 28.20 on the inside.

""Be strong and courageous and get to work for the Lord my God is with you. God will not forsake you. God will see to it that everything is finished correctly.""

God may sometimes speak to us in unusual ways, maybe even through a newspaper cartoon. On a day during my cancer journey when I had been asking a lot of ""why"" questions I opened the funny pages and found the comic strip ""Prickly City." It features a critter that could be a cat or a dog. (I prefer to believe it is a cat.)

The first panel shows the critter standing on a mountain top saying ""Why? Why me?"

The second panel has the critter with arms flung out saying ""Why now? Why this?"

The third panel shows clouds above the head of the critter and a voice saying ""Why not?"

The fourth panel shows the critter standing with arms at its side, a puzzled look on its face and the words “Good question.”

While a cartoon may not speak to everyone, God knows each of us well enough to use whatever means it takes to get our attention.

God will often use more conventional means such as readings from a devotional that speak right to your heart or by bringing to mind a scripture that provides just what you need when you need it.

On a day when we are feeling weak and tired we may be reminded of these words from Is. 40.29-31:

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Or these from Ps. 121.1-8: “I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”

Last, though certainly not least, God will often speak to us through the people around us. People who pray for us, feed us, drive us to and from appointments, given us a place

to live, send chocolate, move furniture, clean and tidy our home.

There may be people who organize a benefit becoming instruments of God's grace and provision as they and those who attend pour out love and support.

There may be an employer who provides an emergency medical grant to help cover expenses.

The Lord may even provide a place for us to live as He did for me by using a landlord who was willing to rent to me even though I didn't have a job at the time.

God will speak to us through friends, friends who will laugh with us and cry with us and give us courage when we don't have any.

The truth is that God is always speaking even when we are unable or unwilling to hear Him, but **God loves us too much to let a little thing like our deafness get in the way of our relationship.**

And then there is **the** absolute, most important lesson I have learned: When believers who follow and trust in Christ face life or death events in their lives we can rest in the assurance that all will be well with our souls.

My Dad provided a perfect example of this kind of faith the day he went in for heart surgery. As he and my brother talked just before his surgery my Dad told Mark, "I'll be okay. If I live, great. If I die, even better. I'll be okay either way."

He had sung the words, "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll;

Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul." many times.

Dad had known the truth of this statement, at least in his head, ever since he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

Now, however, in that moment he knew it in his heart of hearts. Or as he would say, “I know that I know that I know! It **is** well with my soul.”

After all, **God loves us too much to let a little thing like physical life or death get in the way of our eternal relationship.**

²² “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

May these words carry us through all the losses and tragedies we face in this life. Amen.