

QUESTION: Leon, I feel like I've lived through lots of challenges in my life. But I've recently experienced the loss of one of our children. She had always been such a joy to our lives. But that day came when she was diagnosed with cancer in its final stages. Burying one of your own children just doesn't seem right. I want to draw closer to God and feel His love and grace, but it just feels like He is far from me and I'm struggling with all the emptiness. What can I do?

ANSWER: Thank you for your question. There certainly aren't any easy answers when we go through the loss of anyone we love dearly. Whether it is a child, a parent, or a mate, each brings a world of pain and struggle, but each is unique in the kind of hurt it brings. There are some natural feelings that rise out of grief. They have at times been called the stages of grief. The problem with that description is that it leaves the impression we move from one stage to the next and as we move on from a stage it doesn't come back. That is seldom the case in real life. Grief has several elements that may well weave back and forth in our lives as we grow through it. These elements of grief include guilt, anger, emptiness, loneliness, fear, and doubt.

The Book of Job is in many ways one of the greatest studies of all time on grief. Job, a godly man, who was wealthy and highly respected in all the east, was attacked by the devil with God's permission. Satan came before the Lord with the saying that Job was only serving him because he built a wall around him. His challenge to God was to allow him to get behind that wall and attack Job and he will curse you to your face. God allowed him to attack Job. First, by taking away all his wealth. Then on the same day, taking the lives of

all ten of his children at one time. Still Job arose to worship the Lord, saying, "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, blessed is the name of the Lord." Satan then went back to God saying if you will just allow me to attack his body, then he will curse you to your face. And God allowed him. He attacked Job's body from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. He had boils all over his body and no way to find relief. He sat in a pile of ashes crying out to God for relief. Job's wife encouraged him to stop holding on to his integrity. But he continued to trust the Lord. His friends came to comfort him but after a week of silence they concluded it was because Job and his children had done something horrible that caused God to punish them as He had. Job continued to say he hadn't sinned and to plead with God to help him. Ultimately, God called Job to answer questions from him that Job couldn't answer because he kept wanting God to explain why these things were happening to him. But then God told Job's friends they needed to ask Job to pray for them that their sins can be forgiven because he was right in what he said, rather than them. God then blessed Job restoring all his wealth and blessings, two times over and giving him ten more children.

Several lessons come from Job about grief. One major lesson is that death and agony come from the devil rather than God. In I Corinthians 15 Paul said the last enemy that would be destroyed by the Lord when he returns is death. Secondly, we learn that there are many things around death and grief generally that we will never understand in this life. We need to lean on God, even when life doesn't make sense to us. Third we learn that sickness, death, and loss are not indicators that we have sinned against God. Job was the most righteous man in his day, yet he suffered tremendous loss.

Fourth, God doesn't answer our prayers on our schedule. Job needed to learn some lessons and God needed to show Satan that Job wasn't just serving him because he was protecting him always.

In times of loss and grief we need the fellowship, companionship, and friendship of those who care for us. The worst thing we can do is hide from the world until we get better. Sharing our hurts and feelings help us to recover. One of the studies on grief from about ten years ago was that in the time of grief a large percentage of people turn away from God and from the church. In the very time we need each other and need God's blessings we hide from him in anger and frustration. God isn't easily pushed away. Read the Psalms and see all the times David cried out in anguish to God, yet God saw him as the man after his own heart.

In the Book of 2 Corinthians Paul was struggling with grief and loss over a broken relationship with the church in Corinth that he had started. He started the book by praising God as the God of all compassion who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort others in whatever trials they face.

So, seek others who will talk with you and share your hurts and emptiness. Talk to God regularly in prayer. If you feel anger toward God, tell Him and plead for His help and guidance during your storms. Read your Bible every day. Read the Psalms. Read 2 Corinthians and walk with Paul through his hurts. Search out a group of people that are grieving as you are and get together with them regularly so you can be a source of help to each other. Look back on your good memories of the one you have lost and rejoice in the

great times you shared. Praise God for his blessings as you open yourself up to more of them.