

Do you ever wonder why this book has long been called the “Holy Bible?” There is some beautiful stuff in here.

But there is also whole lot of terrible stuff in here. There are stories that will make you angry, others that will disgust you, still others that will inspire you to greatness. There is poetry that sets the heart singing, and other writings that will leave you cold as ice. There is wisdom and mystery. I have often thought about the definition of holy if in fact this is a holy book. It is a holy book not because it is filled with only goodness, but because if you sit with it long enough, wrestle with it hard enough, argue with it thoroughly enough, you will find yourself digging more deeply into your life and into the meaning of life itself.

Because in fact the bible is a very human book. Every potential glory and hubris within the human condition can be found in the Bible. Every moral dilemma. They are all there. It is the story of God’s people and as such it is a beautiful sacred, holy, reflection of marvelous and malicious humanity.

We are taking a look into the story of David today. One of our men’s breakfast participants says he has no respect for David, and points to the terrible thing David did early in his reign, raping Bathsheba and then engineering her husband’s death on the battlefield. And he has a point. It doesn’t get much slimier than that. But frankly, that sounds familiar among leaders today. As ugly as it is, that’s part of our humanity and the way God works within that kind of mess, offering a way in the wilderness of it, a pathway through the hardness of it, can deepen our life.

Today we see a much more mature David. He has tried to be a good king as he has aged, and has in so many ways tried to recover from the mistakes of his younger years. Yet he cannot escape the effects of his mistakes. Within his own family is an estrangement that has broken his heart and has threatened his nation. He has responsibilities to the Kingdom. He must lead. But he has loyalty to his

beloved son Absalom, loves him dearly, even having been betrayed by him, and his fatherly loyalty comes in conflict with his loyalty to the Kingdom. And he tries to navigate that conflicting loyalty in his instruction to his generals: “Yes, defeat him, but don’t kill him.”

And finally, when his son is killed on the battlefield at the hands of his own army, he is gutted with grief and he cries out across the centuries: **“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!** He just repeats it over and over again, as we do when we are devastated by loss. **Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”** Over and over.

It is a very short step from hearing the agony in David’s voice to recalling our own loss and the agony of it. In all honesty, I can sometimes struggle to even read this story as I imagine what it would be like to lose a beloved child. The grief is overwhelming, and complicating the whole thing is the estrangement. David’s grief as a father is totally relatable. But David’s generals have a hard time relating to it, because of Absalom’s disloyalty and all the pain they had witnessed him causing David. In many ways, David is surrounded by people, including us, whose hearts go out to him in his grief over his son. But David is also utterly alone, as no one can completely understand his particular experience of the pain of losing a son who betrayed him.

And so we can observe a grief, David’s grief and remember that experiencing such grief is part of what it means to be human- part of the holy story lived by our ancient ancestors and lived by us today.

So I want to spend a little time talking about our losses and our griefs, their common features and their singularity. In addition to David’s experience, a reference point for my understanding of grief and the way it works is an incredible book by CS Lewis called “A Grief Observed.” CS Lewis, the renowned author of so many books but most popularly, the Chronicles of Narnia, was arguably one of

the most influential Christian writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “A Grief Observed” contains some of his journals written as he made his way through the loss of his beloved wife Joy Davidman and reveals a dedicated Christian who at times feels abandoned by God, at times selfish for being so caught up in the pain of it, at times utterly confused. But what is amazing is his capacity and willingness to observe his experience of it and be honest about that. And probably even more than the content of the book itself, it teaches me to be observant of my own experience, and honest.

For to live is to lose. To be alive is to be, at times, broken. That simply is the way of it. That is part of the human condition. To have any kind of commitment in this life is to open yourself up to being hurt. To have a child is to risk watching that child suffer or worse and there is nothing more terrifying a prospect or devastating an experience. Just ask David or any number of people in this room. To be married is to set in motion a journey that will end in loss, one way or another. Just ask CS Lewis or any number of people in this room. Indeed. Our losses are the shadow side of the most beautiful parts of living. Our grief is the price we pay for the risky love we live.

Lesson 1. We lose.

The trouble is, it so often feels random and unfair. Anyone who says they have figured out why bad things happen to good people, well don't trust their answer. Because I think there is no answer to that question. Things happen. We are made of breakable material. When my 62 year old brother arrived home from his regular run and died of a heart attack, that felt pretty darn random and pretty darn unfair. Often there are underlying, often unknown conditions, but any clear-minded assessment of life must take into account the impossible unknowns. Why did the embers of the Jasper fire land on one house and not another? No idea. Lesson 2: Tragedy often feels so random.

And you know, there is something that I have said to people and that I think is really important, and that is that we don't have to go through our losses alone and everyone does it differently. We can do this together. And at the same time, the song speaks the truth: "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows my sorrow." Every relationship is unique. Every one of us has an internal life that is simply ours, between us and God. So Lesson 3: There is a togetherness, and there is a loneliness to our grief.

I believe I will never finish learning as I experience my own losses and the grief that comes with them, and as I walk this path with you. We observe and we learn and we grow.

But I want to end with one more observation. I have noticed the way in which grief evolves over time. There is a saying that time heals all wounds, and I actually don't believe that. Time is not what heals, nor do all wounds heal. But grief evolves, and healing does come. As CS Lewis puts it in the final chapter of *A Grief Observed*: "Healing does come, though it is snared by the inadequacies of our five senses and the trappings of them." Lewis knows that his beloved wife Joy is more than his memory, more than the photograph that links his mind to a part of her. He knows too that Jesus is more than the gospel record of his life and God is unfathomably more.

Our beloved is bigger than our memory of her. The meaning of our life is bigger than we can even express. God is bigger than our doubt, deeper than our despair. And so by the grace of God we move forward together, each of us in our life, sometimes limpingly, sometimes joyously, but hopefully opening again and again to the possibility of love and its shadowy grief, always coaxing us despite the cost, to live more deeply and love more daringly. Amen