

Encouragement – and very little advice – for facing pain and grief

“LIFE IS PAIN, HIGHNESS. ANYONE WHO SAYS DIFFERENTLY IS SELLING SOMETHING.”

-Wesley (William Golding, *The Princess Bride*)

I assume that since you have picked up these pages, you are experiencing some sort of pain, suffering, grief, or loss. If you are not going through that now, I know you have and you will.

First off, let me sincerely say that I am sorry for that. Having some experience in the matter, there's a chance you may have had some reluctance to really let others into that pain. That is a very lonely place. If you have reached out, it may seem that others don't, or can't really understand. That can also feel very lonely. Maybe people want to help, and so they offer advice – advice that might actually make sense but doesn't really seem to help, or worse, can start to sound like empty platitudes: “God has a plan”... “Trust in Him”... “He won't give you anything you can't handle”... “You'll get through this”...

All I can say, again, is that I'm sorry if that is where you are.

A few years ago, I attended a class on helping people when they are facing grief. One of the simpler, but most lasting lessons was the lesson of the tissue box. Most people have tissues fairly handy on or near their desk, and when confronted with a person whose grief has actually moved them to tears, especially in a professional environment, the natural reaction is to grab the box and offer it to them. It's a small courtesy, a gesture of help, and most people do it instinctively and with the best of

intentions. It's quite natural to think, “If my eyes and nose were running and my face a mess, I would like a tissue.” but in this case, we may be unintentionally communicating the idea that the tears are uncomfortable for us, unwelcome, or in some way unseemly. We mean, “I want to help” and end up saying “Cut it out.” A better approach is to let the person who is grieving or suffering have some time of acceptance from the listener. The tissues are there; if they want one, they will grab one. Otherwise, let your acceptance of their tears become a silent affirmation of their hurt.

Weeping and tears are uniquely human. Seriously. No other animal does it. Weeping is an instinctive reaction to pain, fear and frustration in very young children. It is only later that we learn to suppress that and communicate these feelings through language. Perhaps there is something to be understood in that the Divine Creator chose to design crying into us. Maybe He's okay with it, even if we are not. Maybe He “can take it”...

The book of Job is, in my opinion, the most difficult book in all of scripture. The main reason I feel that way is that after 37 chapters of incredible suffering on Job's part- suffering that cannot be attributed to Job's guilt, and after a lot of very understandable weeping and questioning of God and his justice, God finally speaks and says- in short- “I'm God. You're not.”

Job replies, “I'll shut up now.” and that's that. Okay, there's a bit more to it, and probably some very deep ideas about God's supremacy and His plans and His justice, etc. but there really is NOT a clear, responsive answer to the questions and confusions we feel when we are

hurting. So here is where I will offer a little (very little) advice:

First, no matter how bad you are hurting, don't curse God and don't give up on God...He's still God, and you have to respect that.

Second, **feel free** to feel angry, disappointed, hurt, even abandoned by God AND TELL HIM SO. Throughout the Psalms we see people of great faith openly crying out to God and wondering aloud where He is and what He's doing. He can take it.

Third, do your best to tolerate people who care about you offering advice. It actually is true that God has a plan, and that He loves you. You might even see and feel that someday. But right now, you may just need to cry. God made you that way, and He is listening and near even if it doesn't feel that way just now. You should also know that there are people all around you in this Church who are willing to just listen and cry with you.

Finally, here are some “tissues” you can use. You know where they are and when you are ready to, grab one or two.

**Romans 8:28, James 1:2-4, Psalm 6,
Hebrews 12:2-4, Psalm 10, 1 Samuel 1:10,
2 Samuel 12:13-23, Isaiah 53,
Jeremiah 29:11-13**
