Grief Management: The Divine and the Human Factor

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GRIEF MANAGEMENT: THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN FACTOR

by

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Adviser: Laurențiu Moț
Title: GRIEF MANAGEMENT: THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN FACTOR

Problem

When someone is bereaved, friends, comforters and sympathisers at times try to make sense of the situation. Some people theoretically deal with issues surrounding the death of someone and grief of the surviving ones without any personal experience of these events. Hypothetical and imaginative reasoning in comforting other people is insufficient for making a real impact and a significant and lasting difference to the bereaved. The current study was to try to identify the most effective way to help and console people who have lost their loved ones.

Method

The process of collecting data for this thesis was online libraries which provided hundreds of books and commentaries about the subject of grief and
comforting. Data from books, journals, documentaries, videos and articles online was used to analyse the attitudes, behaviour and experiences of people in grief and their comforters.

Results

Based on the data used, plus the circumstances around Job and his friends, my findings were that the best method of comforting was silence and a limitation and narrowing of speech by the comforters.

Conclusions

Comforters should pay attention to what the bereaved have to say, but yet should not attempt to give advice on how to grieve or about circumstances surrounding dying. Empathy from comforters can be a very helpful balm to the bereaved.
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GRIEF MANAGEMENT: THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN FACTOR

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Ransom Khanye
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GRIEF MANAGEMENT: THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN FACTOR

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

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Laurenţiu Moţ, Adviser

_______________________________________
Zoltan Szalos-Farkas, Ph.D. Date approved
Dedication

To the memory of:

- my late wife Gaofose Mandy Khanye
- my late sister Tobekile Khanye
- my late father Adson Son Khanye

All through whose death I became acquainted with grief and comfort and whom I will always miss on some occasions as I go through this life.
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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

Introduction

Following people's devastation from the loss of their loved ones, it would be a useful thing to help them to find the meaning of life and death. Research in the study of religion could provide answers to the questions of many people. Research in this area is much more than just an academic endeavour. It is about support for individuals who may be in such a situation as this. The focus of this thesis is therefore around coping with suffering, pain and death. The role of silence in comforting those dealing with death, pain and grief will be examined. A position about how people should deal with grief in what is actually a comforting and therefore a useful way for the bereaved will be established. Using arguments mainly from the book of Job, further insights of the divine and humans will be factored in.

The Problem

When someone is bereaved, friends, comforters and sympathisers at times try to make sense of the situation. They try to establish mindset of God in the life of one for whom life suddenly seems hopeless, senseless and meaningless. They say things like, “I can only imagine what you are going through as I have never been through anything like that myself”. “At the time of our loss we feel as though we are the only person in the world who has the feelings we have—and we are right. If well-meaning friends say to us, “I know just how you feel,” we inwardly bristle with denial—No,
No. You couldn’t know what this is like.”¹ Noel and Blair also point out how some particular phrases are not helpful in grief, “Often we’ll say things like, “I know how you feel,” or “perhaps, it was for the best,” in order to minimize their hurt. While this can work in some instances, it never works with grief.”²

As such, supposedly comforting words feel very shallow and ineffective for the purpose they seek to achieve. In fact, an admission that one has never been through any grief renders whatever they say almost void and meaningless. Thus, the problem is that there are many people who theoretically deal with issues surrounding the death of someone and grief of the surviving ones without any personal experience of these events. Hypothetical and imaginative reasoning in comforting other people is insufficient for making a real impact and a significant and lasting difference to the bereaved. Ecclesiastes 7:2 however implies that bereaved people should be visited when it says that it is better in the house of mourning than in the house of feasting as those who are alive can learn something useful.

In light of the above, this paper tries to identify the most effective way to help and console people who have lost their loved ones.

**Purpose of the Study**

“The only certainty in life is death, and yet in our society it is rarely spoken of”,³ says Bolton. Rising above the discomfort and taboo of the subject, I wanted to establish a Biblical way of dealing with the problem of grief which results directly from death. To help all the would be comforters to note and adapt a more effective

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strategy, I wanted to remedy misapplied approaches for supporting those who are grieving. I wanted to show how the arguments of the friends of Job against him were impracticable, insensitive and stressful which all highlighted the human part of dealing with grief. In the end, I wanted to evaluate their silence at the commencement of their visit. It then further examined how silent companionship can be paramount in coping with grief today.

To increase the awareness of comforters, questions that are usually raised by the mourner were reviewed to show how such questions have already been asked many times before. In this regard, Job was factored in as he also asked these questions and I reviewed how God Himself, the Divine, responded. I derived solutions which could be applied to those who may become engulfed by grief. For the complications that it causes, nobody should conscientiously attempt to present these solutions to any bereaved person piecemeal. Only what the Scripture says we should say should be said, and only when we are invited to speak by the bereaved. Otherwise the solutions that will be suggested should be made available only should the bereaved themselves seek them. Therefore the purpose of the study was to highlight an unnoticed solution to grieving. A Biblical solution that, if adapted and used, is sure to be effective. After all, The Bible says that pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.⁴ This study has provided some tools for carrying out the divinely appointed task and some help in the knowledge of how to effectively practice pure and undefiled religion before God. Though the study is mostly focused on comforters, the bereaved can also benefit from a better understanding of some of the emotions that they are going through.

⁴ James 1:27
Terminology and Principal Concepts

While, as Olyan suggests, comfort could be used broadly to mean the performance of acts of consolation. The acts could include the comforters eating food with the mourner in the mourner’s house⁵ and drinking from ‘the cup of consolation’⁶ and then also attempting to ‘restore’ his ‘spirit’⁷ by some speech that strengthens.⁸ The speech of comforters is stated to be ‘tender’ speech as shown in Isaiah 40: 1⁹ and may also involve a comparison of the mourner’s suffering to that of others¹⁰.¹¹ I will focus on non-speech comforting although. I assume the definition of death to be the cessation of life when a person ceases to breathe.¹²

Grief and mourning have two distinct meanings according to Wolfelt who says that grief is the constellation of internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone loved dies while the outward expression of grief is mourning.¹³ For the purposes of the discussion in this paper grief and mourning will be used interchangeably and not according to this definition. This is because in everyday life use of these words are used interchangeable anyway.

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⁵ Job 42:11; Jer 16:7
⁶ Jer 16:7
⁷ Lam 1:16
⁸ Job 16:5
⁹ cf. Ruth 2:13; Gen 50:21
¹⁰ Lam 2:13
¹² Ecclesiastes 12:7
¹³ Alan D Wolfelt, Healing a friend's grieving heart (Fort Collins: Companion Press, 2001), 13.
Experts seem to have no universal solution about how to comfort someone in grief. Their most commonly stated recommendation is that grieving is not universally applicable to everyone. In other words no two individuals grieve the same way. To that effect Noel and Blair state that “Particularly helpful is the degree of permissiveness to grieve in one’s own unique way without regarding it as pathological in a supportive and nonjudgmental way.” Hickman suggests that grieving should be allowed to take as much time as it needs to and hence comforters should not try to promote short-cuts to the grieving process. Parr suggests that comforting is essentially an impossible thing to do when someone is suffering from the loss of a loved one. As comforters, we are drawn by Larrimore to the understanding that when grief strikes, what the bereaved person speaks may not make any sense as in effect it is actually the pain itself that is speaking.

When Job was grieving the loss of his children and of his wealth, he initially praised God by saying “blessed be the name of the Lord.” Then later after sitting in silence while full of grief for seven days and nights with his friends, Job spoke. He agonised so much about his pain and wanted to have an audience with God. But, in a

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18 Job 1:21 (Unless otherwise stated, all bible references in this paper are drawn from the King James Version)
notable way, God remained silent for a while. The Bible does state that there is a time to be silent.¹⁹

This was a qualitative research which explored the attitudes, behaviour and experiences of people in grief and their comforters. The method I used was to gather data from books, journals, documentaries, videos and articles online.

I examined a solution to the suffering problem from an angle that has been overlooked by scholars and Christians alike. I took the view that is uncommon and that perhaps many have not heard being perpetrated before. The topic of grief would of necessity lead me to venture into a slightly broader realm of discussion than a typical theological approach. This was due to the fact that it involves such deep seated psychosocial and emotional states of the mind the divine solution that could only be understood from a broader examination.

Literature Review

The issues investigated in this paper deal with grieving and provision of comfort in grief. In particular the springboard for the discussion is the Book of Job in the Bible from which consideration is made of the impact and merits of silence by those who visited Job to comfort him.

The book Sitting With Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job²⁰ is written by over 6 different authors who tackle various themes in diverse ways. This book was selected as it specifically deals with Job the man himself. The authors in turn do not only address the themes of suffering but they also explore the language used in the book. They delve into things such as genre and the doctrine of divine retribution,

¹⁹ Ecclesiastes 3:7

among many others. They also thoroughly explore the literary work and style of the book in forms such as irony, metaphors and even the Semitic roots of terms in the book of Job. A very important fact comes out of the analyses as the gist of the discussions in the book of Job: the dispelling of “simplistic, mathematically precise and instant applications of the doctrine of retribution.” For the purposes of this investigation however, though it does mention it, the book does do not dwell much on the element of silence by Job's comforters in his grieving.

An insignificance of the silence of Job’s friends is observed in how little attention Matthew Henry’s Concise Bible Commentary gives it on the book of Job. This commentary does not even pay attention at all to the fact that the friends were silent. It only mentions that they did come, and for Henry, that was the only significant aspect. The short paragraph that covers verses 11 to 13 ends with stating that “if the example of Job's friends is not enough to lead us to pity the afflicted, let us seek the mind that was in Christ.”21 Perhaps, it is unfair to expect much coverage of this aspect of silence by a commentary that covers the entire Bible.

To get a better perspective of the context of the setting of Job’s predicament, a look was also taken into the journal article “Dust, Earth, and Ashes as Symbols of Mourning among the Ancient Hebrews” by Morris Jastrow, Jr.22 This article describes various ceremonies and rituals observed within the ancient Hebrew society. It provides a detailed cross-reference of such ritual through the entire Bible to demonstrate the typical Hebraic ways outside of the book of Job. Understanding this

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aspect helps better appreciate the actions of Job the man and that of his friends who came with the purpose of comforting him.

*Mathematical Analysis of the Book of Job* by Robert E. Perrine, is part of the continued literature. Even though at face value one would expect an in-depth coverage of all facets of the book of Job, this book does not even pay attention to the aspects of importance for our study. In fact, it dismisses the first two chapters as just part of an introduction. There is no surprise therefore in finding that there is no coverage of the first two chapters in the book. It would perhaps have been more useful had it covered each chapter of the book of Job.

Much of the available literature on the book of Job as well as about grief and grieving in general do not focus on the aspect of silence in grief on the part of the comforters. This is an area that needs to be explored as it appears to be a very important element that has not been given much attention. Further research from this perspective could provide some answers and solutions to many people who want to comfort the grieving and thereby enable a better impact and more useful experience for the comforted.

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CHAPTER 2

SUFFERING AND WORLDVIEWS

Different Viewpoints

There are problems that could arise from an errant understanding of the state of the dead and thereby causing undue distress to the bereaved. Receiving comfort on the griever's part can significantly be impacted by their views about what happens to the dead from the moment of death. With regards to the role some people think is played by someone who dies, Noel and Blair say that “The spirit of a deceased loved one directly influences the living in some cultures where bereaved family members feel comforted by the knowledge their loved one is watching over them.”¹ Hence if the bereaved believe that their dead loved ones are conscious somehow, then they may think that not only is God watching over them. Instead they may think that even their departed dead are also watching over them from somewhere, like heaven for instance. They may even be afraid to do anything without needing to know first what the dead think about it. To be effective comforters for the bereaved, it would be useful to have a detailed and broad understanding of the different viewpoints that people have about the state of their deceased. Yet even this variance in the information on the state of the dead becomes more the reason why speeches to comfort the bereaved should be carefully guarded against or done minimally and cautiously. Silence therefore could be considered golden in such times as these.

¹ Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair, I Wasn’t Ready to Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping, and Healing After the Sudden Death of a Loved One, rev. ed. (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2008), 53.
A Person is a Soul

According to Collin and Lewis a big problem emanates from the disagreement of what comprises a person. “There is no unanimity among Christians as to what it means to be a person, yet this issue is at the heart of any understanding of life after death.” ² So if there is no agreement about what a person is, then there clearly can be no agreement about what the death of a person means. Smith spiritually defines death as a separation of man's consciousness from God in the same way that death is the separation of consciousness from the body. ³ The Bible unequivocally tells us how God created mankind, and at which point he actually became a person or a living soul. “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” ⁴ Thus, we know that only the combination of the breath of life and the dust of the ground forms a living soul. Yet there are those like Sivananda who argue that “the entrance of a soul into a body is called birth. The soul’s departure from the body is called death. A body is dead if the soul is absent.” ⁵ He goes further to say that a human being comprises of 5 elements that include earth water, fire, air and ether. ⁶ The redefinition of a human being inevitably opens avenues for conflicts in some people's minds about their understanding of life and death. Whatever the conflict may be in this regard, the inception of human life in the sinless chapter of Genesis 2:7 is reversibly confirmed

⁴ Genesis 2:7
⁶ Ibid, 6.
by Ecclesiastes, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Therefore, Job having been a Biblical man, the process of dealing with his mourning is based on the Biblical definition of death.

Life After Death and Reincarnation

Using the existence of archaeological evidence, Casey suggests that people have always protected and provided for their dead by giving them essentials they would need in the life beyond the grave. As one sets out to comfort the bereaved, they should also know that there are some advocates, in existence, for the claim that when one dies they become reincarnated. Such advocates include Coleman and Jinpa who, speaking of someone who has just died, speak of an emancipation of the consciousness of the deceased. They say that if this emancipation has not been achieved then the deceased person's face complexion will turn grey and dusty and their body will very quickly begin to decompose. They say that on the other hand that while the body of the deceased is in an intermediate state of reality, if their consciousness does not attain liberation then they will immediately fall into an immediate state of rebirth. In other words, they will immediately become conceived again and become an embryo in someone else and reincarnated into a new baby and start their life over again. Even Haberman suggests this idea of continuity of life after death when he states that, “Death of the body does not mean the end of existence.

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7 Ecclesiastes 12:7


Alive or dead, one remains part of the world. Death marks a change, a transition. It is not total annihilation. There is continuity of some kind.”

Through the awareness of such views of life after death and reincarnation, all would be comforters would do well to not allow the moments of grief to turn into moments of philosophical and theological argument because there could be huge disagreements between what they think and what the bereaved think.

According to the Bible, the Dead Know Nothing

According to Blenkinsopp, life after death is completely ruled out in the book of Job. A number of Christians, in fact, believe that the dead know nothing. This belief is Biblically based confirmed by the Scriptures which say that “the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything.” Beyond that, these Christians also Biblically explain that death is a sleep. They teach that when one dies they are not annihilated but that they only enter into a temporarily unconscious state, which the Bible repeatedly calls a state of sleep, until the resurrection day. In their teachings, to show how the Bible calls death a sleep, the Christians use the Old Testament examples of Solomon and David and other kings of Israel and Judah who are said to

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12 Ecclesiastes 9:5
be sleeping with their forefathers. 13 Even Job called death a sleep, 14 and also David, 15 Jeremiah, 16 and Daniel. 17

From the New Testament also, the same imagery of death as sleep is shown. Starting with a description of Jairus's daughter who had died and Jesus stating her to be sleeping. 18 Then after Lazarus had died he was also referred to as sleeping too. 19 After the resurrection of Christ, it is written in Matthew that many "saints who had fallen asleep were raised". 20 When Stephen's was martyred, Luke wrote that "he fell asleep". 21 Then Peter and Paul also called death a sleep. 22 Therefore, the Biblical representation of death as a sleep is shown clearly to fit its nature: 1. In moments of sleep people are not conscious. In other words, "The dead know nothing." 23 2. Those who are asleep are not consciously thinking. "His breath goeth forth, . . . in that very day his thoughts perish." 24 3. All the activities of the day come to an end during sleep. "There is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going." 25 4. When people sleep, they cannot associate with those who are awake, and

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13 1 Kings 2:10; 11:43; 14:20, 31; 15:8; 2 Chronicles 21:1; 26:23
14 Job 14:10-12
15 Psalm 13:3
16 Jeremiah 51:39, 57
17 Dan 12:2
18 Matthew 9:24; Mark 5:39
19 John 11:11-14
20 Matthew 27:52
21 Acts 7:60
22 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:4
23 Ecclesiastes 9:5
24 Psalm 146:4
25 Ecclesiastes 9:10
with any of the activities of those who are awake. "Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun."  

5. All the emotions of anyone who is asleep become inactive. "Their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished."  

6. When one sleeps they do not praise God. "The dead do not praise the Lord."  

7. Before awaking one needs to have been asleep. ("The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth." John 5:28,29).  

It is also important for people to understand the terminology used in the Bible about a soul, so they can be safe from deception. As stated before, the Bible clearly explains that the body and the soul are indivisible. There are times that a whole person is referred to in the Bible as a soul as in “God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”  

and in “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”  

There also other times when a soul is used to refer to the affections and emotions of the person as in “My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death.”  

But the components that indivisibly make up a person right from creation are the earth and the breath of life. The soul was not given to Adam as a separate entity, but Adam became a living soul. Jung is just one example of those whose views are at variance with the Biblical text when he says “There are many human beings who throughout their lives and at the moment of death lag behind their  

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26 Ecclesiastes 9:6  
27 Ibid.  
28 Psalm 115:17  
30 Genesis 2:7  
31 Ezekiel18:20  
32 Mark 14:34  
33 Genesis 2:7
own potentialities … Hence their demand to attain in death that share of awareness which they failed to win in life.34 There is nothing that can be attained after death and even Jung himself acknowledges this but yet asserts that “although there is no way to marshal valid proof of continuance of the soul after death, there are nevertheless experiences which make us thoughtful.”35

The Soul After Death

The soul has no conscious existence apart from the body, and there is no Scripture that indicates that at death the soul survives as a conscious entity. Yet Saward says, “According to Catholic doctrine, as reaffirmed by Pope Benedict, all souls that at the moment of death are altogether free from the guilt of sin and the temporal punishment due to sin enter Heaven immediately, or at least immediately after the particular judgement.”36 Further, because of the failure to rise at the second resurrection, Lloyd-Jones does recognize the futility of being ungodly at death as he says, “The death of the ungodly is a terrible thing.”37 Indeed, the Bible unequivocally declares that "the soul who sins shall die."38 39 Yet in contradiction with Scripture, Nicklas et al speak of the soul as a bearer of thinking and feeling after death which must take the responsibility at judgement that takes place in another world that it goes to after death. They introduce a counterpart to the soul which has an individuality and


35 Ibid.


38 Ezekiel 18:20

which they refer to as the daēnā translated as a religious view. They say the soul can even temporarily leave the person even when they are still alive and return to them. They posit that just like the soul, the individuality of counterpart, daēnā also remains alive after a person dies.\footnote{Tobias Nicklas, Friedrich V. Reiterer, and Joseph Verheyden, eds., The Human Body in Death and Resurrection, ed. Tobias Nicklas, Friedrich V. Reiterer, and Joseph Verheyden (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 17.}

While Mattson et al have a more illustrious point of view of what transpires when we die, they argue that when we die we may think that we are going into the dark, but the Spiritual Light of God shines through death and illuminates our spiritual self all the more strongly. They say that as the moon appears so much brighter in the sky at night, when the sun has disappeared from the horizon, so the Life Force of God reflects through the bodies that we live in when we go into the darkness that is called death. Stating that the light and power of God illuminates and sustains our inner selves that go on. With this explanation of what happens when we die they then ask the question why we should be afraid of death.\footnote{A. D. Mattson, Margaret Flavell, and Ruth Mattson Taylor, Evidence from Beyond: An Insider’s Guide to the Wonders of Heaven—And Life in the New Millennium: More After-Death Communications Received From Theologian A.D. Mattson, Through Clairvoyant Margaret Flavell (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brett Books, 1999), 49.} Again this is not Biblical and yet the people who lose their loved ones could be clinging to this kind of belief.

Hell or Heaven at Death

There are some who think that those who die go to heaven or hell straight after death. Arp and MacCraw state that “a component of a popular conception of Hell features the damned immediately falling into perdition upon death.”\footnote{Robert Arp and Benjamin McCraw, eds., The Concept of Hell, (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 6.} Further complicating the issue for those wanting to help in grief comforting is that there is no
universal agreement about what hell is. In fact, there is such a minefield of viewpoints that can leave anyone baffled. For instance, Seymour claims that “if a person is in hell, each moment of her existence is on the whole bad, and these moments will never come to an end. This does not entail that, at any given point in time, the damned experience eternal punishment.”\textsuperscript{43} This argument in itself cannot even begin to help us to understand what kind of thoughts may be in the mind of the grieving. What words would be suitable for anyone in grief are completely variable depending on their way of thinking and of understanding the Bible.

Existence of Both Heaven and Hell Denied

Spong actually speaks against the very definitions of both heaven and hell and says that hell is neither a place of reward nor hell a place of punishment but rather, heaven is about the resurrection. “I dismiss heaven as a place of reward, and I dismiss hell as a place of punishment. I find neither definition either believable or appealing. Life after death must mean more than that. Talking about heaven is, for me, like talking about the resurrection.”\textsuperscript{44}

Immortality: Ghosts

It is worth noting that people who mourn may be thinking that the dead are immortal. The idea that mankind is immortal gives rise to animists who believe that the dead become spirits. The spirits can be imagined as ghosts who make a nuisance of themselves and to the living as they hover around their graves.\textsuperscript{45} These same ghosts are expected to be malevolent if not appeased but even when they have been appeased

\textsuperscript{43} Charles Seymour, \textit{A Theodicy of Hell} (Boston, MA: Springer, 2000), 53.

\textsuperscript{44} John Shelby Spong, \textit{Resurrection: Myth or Reality?} (Pymble, Australia: HarperOne, 1995), 759.

they are not friendly. The ghosts are said to be immensely powerful especially those of chiefs. As such the deceased can sometimes be buried bound in a fetal position to prevent them returning to plague the living.46

Views About the Final Judgement

There could be some griever in whose minds may have some ideas of purgatory into which some purportedly bad souls of their loved ones could go. As Kabir claims purgatory or the antechamber to heaven is commonly known as the interim period that lies between the time that someone dies and the final judgement day. She says that in Anglo-Saxon England several texts refer to purgatory as the interim paradise. She suggests that purgatory, which she says is a heavenly state of bliss after death, houses good souls before they go to the heavenly paradise.47 Yet the Bible specifies the place into which all dead people go as the grave.48 Hodson simply states that “Death symbolizes total spiritual unawareness.”49

According to Stefanovic, the final judgement is universal and all those who are dead, however they died will be raised and brought to judgement according to their works. He continues to explain that the lake of fire is not a literal everlasting burning hell but a place of the full and ultimate end of all rebellion against God where even death and hades are thrown into the lake of fire.50 This teaching is in line with the

46 Ibid., 17.


48 Psalm 89:48


50 Ranko Stefanović, Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 582.
Bible and yet even this should not be anybody's focus when trying to comfort those who mourn.

With all these viewpoints thus considered, it would not be wise to presume to speak comforting words to anyone who loses their loved one. A safe thing to do is to just be present and just be quiet.

**God's Ways May Never be Understood by Humans**

Comforters need the awareness that the book of Job debunks the myth that only the evil people suffer and even die. While that may be true in some instances, it is not the standard set by God. He says Himself that He causes rain to fall on the good and on the evil.\(^{51}\) He blesses even those who do not deserve it. The most important thing to be understood about God is that He is God; and so, He will do what we may not agree with and what we may never understand. He will even do what we see as most unfair as in the case with the destruction of Uzah\(^2\) who was attempting to save the ark of the covenant from falling over. In agreement, Larrimore suggests that “every word of the book of Job, including the words of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, contains precious truth. But the book of Job also contains a warning about the difficulty of applying biblical truth in practice, a difficulty grounded not only in God’s hidden purposes but in the frightening otherness.”\(^3\) Larrimore further asserts that Job's friends “all subscribe to versions of a retributionist view that sees suffering as divine punishment for iniquity, and they counsel Job to confess to sins, even the ones

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\(^{51}\) Matthew 5:45

\(^{52}\) 2 Samuel 6:6-7

he may not have known he committed, or ones committed by his children”. But according to Piper and Taylor, Job simply despises “Satan's hateful hand and looking straight past him to God for the cause and for his mercy.”

While concluding that we must welcome whatever God sends our way, Levenson also brings out the predicament:

Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? The answer lies in recognizing the infinite gap between divine “knowledge” and what people designate by the same term. “If man knows this,” the philosopher writes, “every misfortune will be borne lightly by him. And misfortunes will not add to his doubts regarding the deity . . . but will, on the contrary, add to his love”. That is to say, a philosophically sophisticated person who experiences misfortunes will know better than to fault God. He will instead welcome lovingly all that a mysterious and unknowable divine providence sends his way.

So even if we do not understand why suffering must take place we must still trust God and not blame God. But even with its contradiction against God's promise and its role in the causation of doubts in the minds of Christians, Kolb states that suffering is part of life. With such an understanding of the fact that God will act in His own way, we may begin the journey of acceptance and healing from the myriad of problems and tragic deaths that we experience.

We read the book of Job from a vantage point. We have the privilege of understanding that which perplexes Job far better than Job himself ever could. Armed with such a knowledge of how the events of this life are beyond anyone’s control, we ought therefore to be ready to accept that things could happen that we may also never

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54 Ibid., 2.

55 John Piper, and Justin Taylor eds., Suffering and the Sovereignty of God, eds. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 23


57 Robert Kolb, Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 64.
understand. As humans we cannot access that which is hidden from us and which belongs only to the divine.

Larrimore suggests that “God both endorses and exceeds our categories of justice, and can subject his human creations to experiences that push them toward the abyss of thinking him a tyrant in order to help them understand this.”

Anyone who has read the book of Job is someone who essentially should understand a little bit better about the workings of the divine. It becomes therefore a non-debatable misnomer that only evil people die. The argument perpetrated by the three friends of Jobs is ultimately just a mythical one. This understanding is critical for one’s ability to cope with the grief that can befall them. Our understanding of God’s role in our suffering is of paramount importance for our ability to be comforted and to heal from our pain.

Satan's Argument

The idea of immortality of the soul can bring delightful thoughts to the bereaved. Flawed even though it may be, there are many Scriptures that have been and can be used to support the concept of the said immortality.

Even with all the plausible yet flawed interpretations of the state of the dead, it is inexcusable to attempt to comfort mourners by deception. It is downright Satanic as the author of that argument was Satan himself when he told Eve that she would not surely die even after disobeying God. Comforters must be wary of using Satan's arguments to offer solace to the grieving.

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58 Larrimore suggests that when this happens to our fellows, however, we are called not to judge but to support each other. Ibid., 112

59 Mythical in the sense that is untrue, idealized, fictitious, invented or fabricated as it is untrue that only evil people die.
Words and Silence
Introducing Silence

Our investigation of silence begins with the biblical account of how Job's friends reacted to his heightened state of great grief, “So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.”\footnote{Job 2:13} Seven days and seven nights of sitting upon the ground is a significant length of long time. The text further says that none spake a word unto him because they saw that his grief was very great. The long silence catches the attentive reader's attention and becomes the point of interest. The reason given for the silence is that Job's friends saw that his grief was very great. Great is an expression of a high degree or magnitude of the said grief. Added to great is the further emphasis of the word 'very'. 'Very' therefore suggests a mammoth emphasis to show the reader the extreme greatness of the described grief. What then comes out loud and clear from that text is the silence alongside sitting down.

The verse before this (verse 12) states that the friends, upon seeing Job in such a miserable and unrecognizable state, wept. Coupled with verse 13 the context conjures up from memory the text, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.” \footnote{Psalm 137:1} The prophet Nehemiah also says, “when I heard these words, I sat down and wept, and mourned \textit{certain} days.” \footnote{Nehemiah 1:4} Sitting down to weep was also done by Hagar. \footnote{Genesis 21:16} Mordecai also sat down and wept out of distress. \footnote{Esther 4:1}
Zuck introduces a perspective of seeing Job's friends' silent companionship as something that was customary in Job's day:

Sitting down in silence with him for a week may have been their way of mourning over his deathlike condition, or it may have been an act of sympathy and comfort. Other explanations for their silence are that the comforters were so horrified at his loss that words of sympathy escaped them, or that they began to reflect in surprise at the possibility of his having been a hypocrite all along, considering his suffering as punishment for sin. Whatever their reasons, they followed the custom of that day and allowed the grieving person to express himself first.65

It behoves us to emulate the model of dealing with grief in a way that does not add more pain to the bereaved. Rather, the rituals of mourning and comforting the mourner should necessarily enable the hurting people to feel better than they do. We ought therefore to pay close attention to the things that do not bring distress but that could afford some degree of soothing. Such is the essence of comforting people in grief. Nonetheless, death is among many things that causes grief and the need for mourning. In fact death is so horrible that, Collingwood puts it grimly that “the death of our dearest friend darkens for us the very light of the sun.”66 The severity of the pain of grieving a death can even drive one to wish for their own death. Speaking of Job the man in the third chapter of the book of Job, Werner explains this paradox, “Job is brought to light (i.e. life) by the creator, but now wishes to be covered by the shadow of death, in order to escape the oppressing omnipresence of the creator. Having lost just about all reason for hope in the realm of life, he turns his attention and hope to the realm of death.”67


Words in Grief Moments

A time of grief for anyone who has previously been through one is not a difficult memory at all to recall. Even the things that people speak to us about as we grieve are often very easy to remember. Comforters should be aware that one of the most vivid thoughts in memory pertaining to times of grief are the words said during those times. Some people have said that they have never experienced any loss like that and, so it is hard for them to know what to say. This admission alone is the one that should not even be expressed to the one who is grieving. Even White acknowledges that “many have borne so few burdens, their hearts have known so little real anguish, and they have felt so little perplexity and distress in behalf of others, that they cannot understand the work of the true burden bearer.”68 This is understandable and can be appreciated more if they do not use words to speak from their lack of experience. The silent company of comforters could be more comforting than their stating that they had no first-hand experience of what one is going through. Silence is probably the best comfort from a friend.

To the question, “What is the effect of speaking to someone who is grieving?” The emphatic and categorical answer is that the effect of speaking to the grieving is close to null. This is because the hurting person may hardly even synthesize whatever they are being told. White illustrates that even the words of Jesus Himself could not help the disciples much in their grief. The hopes of the disciples had been devastated and dashed by the death of Christ as they watched his drooping head and closed eyelids as well as his hair full of blood. Up to the point of his death they did not believe he would die and seeing his pierced feet and hands filled them with anguish and sorrow. They could hardly even believe it that He was now dead and with the

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sorrow that filled them they could not even recall that He had told them that things
would happen exactly this way. They lost all their faith as they saw the cross and
Christ as a victim bleeding on it. The future now seemed dark with despair and they
were filled with pain for their Lord whom they loved.\textsuperscript{69} They were so discouraged and
hurt that they could not remember what He had told them of His death before it even
transpired. They were now in a state of shock and sorrow their minds could not but
grieve as humans do. In agreement with the idea that it is best to speak very little if at
all, Parr asserts that when someone is grieving, “there is nothing circular or spiritual
that you could say to them, at that time that could remove or lessen the pain.”\textsuperscript{70}

With regards to the grief of Job, there is a perfect example of both what to do
and what not to do. Firstly, the first comforter for Job, his wife should really have
remained silent for two reasons. The first is that she was herself not in a state of
normalcy. Yet as Batnitzky and Pardes observe, “it is rather surprising, that in the
prologue Job’s final misfortune is not the loss of his children, but rather the injury to
his skin.”\textsuperscript{71} All of Job’s dead children were also her children as they were borne by
her. She too really needed some comforting as she was hurting and grieving just like
Job himself. One difference was that she was not covered with any skin disease like
Job was. And even Larrimore concurs that “as our words inevitably are finite in
meaning, we do best to “keep our mouth shut” when, like Job, we encounter
affliction.”\textsuperscript{72} The second reason why Job’s wife should have remained silent was that

\textsuperscript{69} Ellen Gould White, \textit{The Desire of Ages} (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 80.

\textsuperscript{70} Allen Parr, “Grief: How to comfort someone who is grieving” (video), November 29, 2016,

\textsuperscript{71} Leora Batnitzky and Ilana Pardes, eds., \textit{The Book of Job: Aesthetics, Ethics, Hermeneutics
(Perspectives On Jewish Texts and Contexts),} ed. Leora Batnitzky and Ilana Pardes (Berlin: De Gruyter
Mouton, 2014), 86.

\textsuperscript{72} Mark Joseph Larrimore, \textit{The book of Job - a biography} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University,
2013), 109.
her talking was not useful, because of what she suggested to Job. She was very simplistic and pragmatic when she advised him to just curse the Lord and die. Boadt suggests the possibility that “she felt that blasphemy would have sudden death as a consequence, and that this would put job out of his misery. In any case, the import of her words is to question the value of ‘righteousness’.\textsuperscript{73} But God’s suffering servant rejected her foolish advice and said we must accept both good and bad from God. Her silence would have been of far better assistance to Job than what ultimately turned out to be her foolish speech.

After Job’s friends heard of his horrible misfortune, they agreed to go and visit him and comfort him.\textsuperscript{74} They had a very noble intention and genuinely wanted to help their friend to cope with his unpleasant situation. The Bible does not state how they had actually intended to comfort him. Yet the most impact is felt from what actually transpired when the friends reached Job’s homestead. Firstly, they are said to have been unable to recognize him.\textsuperscript{75} They then tore their clothes and wept painfully as they were swallowed by grief. Their reaction of silence to Job’s grief is not only surprising but we should all take a leaf out of. By their silence, Job’s friends did comfort him ever so much more than anything else that transpired afterwards. They are said to have stayed for seven days and seven nights without saying anything to Job. As Alter suggests, “One might imagine that after the seven days of mourning, they came to the conclusion that he must have been a scoundrel to deserve all this suffering.”\textsuperscript{76}


\textsuperscript{74} Job2:11

\textsuperscript{75} Job 2:11

\textsuperscript{76} Robert Alter, \textit{Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes A Translation with Commentary} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 39.
As the Easy English Bible commentary says, we can learn many things from Job's friends' actions of chapter 2. Firstly, they were very careful not to upset their friend Job as they were sympathetic to him. Even during the night, they stayed with him and never left him. When he sat on the ash heap, so did they. They politely remained silent as Job himself was not talking because of his great pain. Maybe they wanted to talk but they respected Job's preference to remain quiet. In chapter 2 their actions were both right and good even though later they would say plenty of foolish things. However, in chapter 2 they really cared and were patient and kind to their friend. We could really learn something from them.\(^{77}\) If only they had just got up and left him after the long silence of seven days the lesson could have been more profound. And it may have been the best thing they would have done for themselves and for their friend. The whole story would have been an entirely different one altogether.

Sam Cox thinks somewhat differently about the silence of Job's friends. He thinks they were already suspicious of Job's guilt being responsible for his affliction. He says that they probably felt the sanctity of grief, as we feel and that it was impossible to assuage it with mere words as that it would be intrusive and even irreverent to speak in the prevailing air of grief. He imagines that the friends were asking themselves of “what secret sin Job had been guilty of that he should have been so sorely smitten by God.” He thinks that they may have even asked “each other with their eyes what was the hidden flaw in the life of one whom they had accounted perfect.”\(^{78}\) Larrimore seems to agree that “the friends, knowing God’s commitment to

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the Law, presume to know that God has judged Job. True faith expresses itself not as they do but as humility and silence in the sufferer, solicitude and comfort in others.”

Comforters Become Predators

When Job finally broke the silence, Eliphaz decided to interject, thereby destroying all the good that he and his friends had done by their silence until then. Eliphaz, as the second recorded comforter to speak to Job after his wife tells Job “Remember, I pray thee, whoever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God, they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed.” So the comforter has now turned into the accuser and is now trying to convince Job that he is suffering because he is not innocent. This to someone who is hurting is not comforting at all, but it simply adds insult to injury.

The third cycle of Job’s friends’ speeches literally comprises of insults on Job. The human element has manifested itself at this point. For instance, Eliphaz blasts Job with gross allegations:

Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry. But as for the mighty man, he had the earth; and the honourable man dwelt in it. Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken. Therefore snares are round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee;  

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80 Job 4:7-9


82 Job 22:5-10
Instead of consoling Job, the comforters have turned into predators on the one they came to give solace to. It is not foreign to human nature to have a good intention at the onset but to get swayed by some situations into what was not intended. This risk in humans not only requires a lot of discipline to prevent being drawn into discussion by what one hears. As such, it is essential to have a prior plan from the beginning to not say anything in spite of what one hears.

Although they were completely wrong, the speeches of Job’s friends were reasonable. The friends were trying to help Job by putting him right and attempting to make him confess his sins to them. This by itself was wrong in that even though he had sinned, it was not their duty to make him confess to themselves. Only God should hear our confessions. But Eliphaz thought he had received wisdom and revelation in a dream. So Eliphaz had a conviction that he was doing the right thing by castigating Job. Yet even his supposedly inspired revelation did nothing for Job’s situation but worsen it.

Keeping silent is key for making an effective impact as a comforter because none can really explain the deep theological secrets. For instance, when someone has prayed a sincere prayer of faith for healing and they do not get healed despite their prayer, we really do not have any explanation. The only things people often resort to saying are that maybe it was not God’s will or that God saw it fit to let them sleep and rest. How much comfort is such an utterance to a grieving individual? Such talking, to a widower who remains with small children from a dead mother, is not comforting talk. It is far better for people to say nothing than to suggest that God’s will was for his wife to die. To hint that God prefers a man to remain a widower with little children to look after can be extremely insensitive. It is not comforting news and can easily

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83 Job 4:13-21
turn someone against God. As Larrimore says, “While none can stand in the face of God’s power and wisdom, God graciously grants humans not to judge them by his hidden judgments but only by those he has shared with them.”\textsuperscript{84} So, rather than misrepresenting God with distorted explanations that misrepresent Him, it is better to be silent.

In the Bible, whenever Jesus healed people, He always told them, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.”\textsuperscript{85} On this basis, therefore, if someone was not healed we essentially must say (if we insist on speaking) that they did not have faith because those who had faith were healed by Jesus. What therefore is the difference between our theology and that of Eliphaz, Bildad and Elihu? They certainly must have been good and intelligent theologians to take-on someone like Job. They acknowledge the marvellous things Job did for others before. This suggests that Job was a famous and top-class theologian. An assertion by Kou actually shows this to be true as he says that, “In Job 29:21-25, we see how others respected his counsel and his words. There was a certain authority and position that he held before their eyes. He even sat as chief among them.”\textsuperscript{86}

Because as humans we have no right to judge anyone, including those who have died, we cannot promise anyone that their loved ones will be resurrected on the first resurrection. We cannot even guarantee the resurrection status of people whom we knew in real life and whom in our view appeared to be perfect candidates for heaven. So, if we are to tell a grieving person not to worry because they will see their


\textsuperscript{85} Mark 5:34

loved one again on the resurrection day then we are promising them what we do not
have any control over. In fact, we cannot even know what will happen to the person
that we are trying to comfort. They may not even take part in the first resurrection
themselves. So, the promise to see their loved ones again can be a false one altogether.
Thus, the best course of action in our role as comforters to the bereaved is silent
companionship.

One of the worst things that people who want to help bereaved people with is
assuring them that their loved ones are already safe in heaven. Some people say that
our late relatives are proudly watching us from heaven as they see how well we are
taking care of each other here on earth. From some people who do not know any
better this attempt to comfort us may be excusable though not helpful. Disappointingly, some of the people who make such remarks are Christians. Yet it is a
taken straight from the Bible, that the dead know nothing and have no
consciousness.\textsuperscript{87} So even this misapplication of Biblical truth underscores the
usefulness of silence.

Silence in Grief Moments

If we ever need words of comfort to help mourners, the Bible, through the
apostle Paul, tells us what words to use to comfort each other in death “Comfort one
another with these words.”\textsuperscript{88} Otherwise, we must simply weep with those who weep.\textsuperscript{89}
And we must keep our silence and just listen to the mourners. They have the right to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[87] Ecclesiastes 9:5
\item[88] 1 Thess 4:18
\item[89] Romans 12:15
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speak and it is our duty to hear them and not interrupt them. Our mere presence makes a great impact and enables our dear ones to feel the care that they need.

Balentine highlights that “Job provides a template for heroism that significantly shaped the culture and values of religious and secular thinkers”. To some extent, Job’s friends exemplify the way we should comfort one another in moments of grief. We should hold our peace and only say words of comfort that are in line with Paul’s counsel in Thessalonians. Thus, holding our peace makes us act in accordance with Job’s friends' act of silence as they first became acquainted with Job at his home.

St. Francis of Assisi famously said, “Preach the gospel. And if necessary use words”. One thing that we can learn with absolute certainty from the book of Job about what to do for the bereaved is to diligently listen to them. As he opens his mouth to speak after 7 days of silence, out of the grieved soul of Job as Clines says, “we are invited to view the man Job in the violence of his grief.” As Batnitkzy and Pardes state, “In pain, language is in danger of being reduced to inarticulate cries, yet it can also be magnified, exaggerated, swollen. The language of pain can also be characterized as a hyper-verbality, an attempt to use the voice to overcome the spatial


91 “Francis of Assisi,” Wikiquote, accessed November 8, 2017, https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Francis_of_Assisi#Preach_the_gospel,_and_if_necessary._Use_words. There is a dispute about the actual origin of this quote and several sources say Francis did not actually say these words.

entrapment of pain and the vulnerability of the body.” so as the grieved speak we should silently but attentively hear them out.

As we listen, we are not to be analyzing and judging the bereaved or preparing our responses so as to debate with them. They do not need any arguments or any reasoning from anybody. Their state of mind is very delicate and their grief is excessive. Larrimore notes that “Job can give us a template for our grief, transforming experiences of personal eclipse into moments of profoundly human affirmation.”


CHAPTER 3

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUFFERING AND REMEDIES

Grief Resulting From Death

I now focus slightly on what happens to a human being who is suffering due to the death of someone. A clear reflection and understanding by comforters, of this is critical in the quest to help to manage a grief situation by silence rather than by saying many things that could be misunderstood if understood at all.

Firstly, humans are created a little lower than the angels\(^1\) but higher than animals,\(^2\) yet it is worth noting that even the animals do grieve as Alderton shows: “When Giovanni passed away, those around recorded that the donkey cried for his much loved owner, reflecting grief of those who knew him.”\(^3\) Knowles reports of a dog in China whose owner died and which refused to leave the owner's grave where “villagers even tried to coax the dog away and back to the village, but he always finds his way back to the grave site.”\(^4\) Nelson also says that “observations collected in 2006 and 2007 suggests that dolphins and whales, like with chimps, gorillas and elephants,

\(^1\) Hebrews 2:7

\(^2\) Genesis 1:28

\(^3\) David Alderton, *Animal Grief - How Animals Mourn* (Dorset: Veloce, 2011), 47. Because of remarkable links with animals shortly after his death, Giovanni was canonised on July 16, 1228 by pope Gregory IX. Now universally known as St Francis of Assisi. Giovanni is recognised as the patron saint of animals.

may experience complex emotions once believed to be reserved for human beings: deep grief at the death of a loved one.”

Humans grieve the loss of loved ones. Some losses have a greater impact than others depending on closeness to the deceased. Some people get more affected than others or show more reaction than others. Even the death of animals or pets has a sombering effect on human beings. National disasters and catastrophes that sometimes destroy entire cities also have an impact on people.

When bereavement comes, all things in the environment seem to enhance it. Hickman observes that “everything brushes against the raw wound of our grief, reminding us of what we have lost, triggering memories—a tilt of the head, a laugh, a way of walking, a touch, a particular conversation.” Indeed in grief there are many things that seem to make the pain worse and unbearable and whatever the circumstances may be, we all get affected by death somehow. The news of death somehow affects the state of the mind and in some instances even the state of the body. Sometimes people experience extreme reactions like unconsciousness due to receiving news of a death. Other people even become irrational and disoriented. Larrimore agrees with the fact that the realities agony and abandonment can distort consciousness. Describing Job's grief, Kreeft says “Despair is Job's mood. His suffering is not only bodily but also spiritual. What has he to look forward to except death? He has lost everything, even God—especially God, it seems.” In such a state

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words from anyone who intends to bring solace could not be expected to be helpful and therefore should be avoided.

There are further examples of reactions to death situations. Upon encountering the death of someone close, the feelings of despondency, helplessness, deep pain and powerlessness can be experienced. Noel and Blair point out that “When sudden loss enters our reality, we awaken in an unfamiliar world.”9 For instance, when king David learned of the death of his son Absalom, “the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!”10 But the king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, “O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!”11 The humane thing to do for David in this state would have been to let him grieve and refrain from telling him things that try to minimize his pain. Sadly, in this example, the kingly duty for David compelled him to place his nation and his army over his grief for his son. This is a typical example of how not to help someone who is grieving because his duty was only a distraction but not a solution to his pain. It is just another example to show that silence would have been the best solution for the situation.

Job's Reaction

Even Job had an imbalance of emotions when he was struck by catastrophe: “Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and

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9 Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair, *I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping, and Healing After the Sudden Death of a Loved One*, Updated ed. (Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, 2008), 36.

10 2 Samuel 18:22

11 2 Samuel 19:4
worshipped.”

12 So did his three friends: “And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven.”

13 So Job’s reaction was to stand up in distress, just as some of us would do even today when we hear some bad news. Then he tore his robe, unlike what many of us would still do today. Tearing one’s robe typically expressed great grief in the ancient Near East. Then he fell to the ground, again as most of us might still do. But very differently from how we or even those in his day probably would do, he worshipped God in his moment of great distress. And the appropriate response to his reaction was just to keep silent and just let him be.

Professional Mourners

In ancient times, a family could even hire mourners to sustain the wailing and mourning for days. “Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning women, that they may come: And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters.” Interestingly, the hirelings are brought in to sustain the tears and mourning rather than them being for the provision of much needed comfort. Even Olyan accounts for the Biblical record about professional mourners, “Both biblical texts and other West Asian materials attest to the institution of the professional mourner. Such mourners, often but not always identified as women, were apparently summoned at the time of a death and engaged to weep and utter laments over the

12 Job 1:20

13 Job 2:12


16 Jeremiah 9:17-18
dead.” There is no record of any hired comforters but hired mourners. Yet the mourners were in effect playing the weeping role but in effect providing the comforting as they wept. Olyan actually points this out to be true when he says, “At the death of a king, allies or vassals may send representatives to the court in mourning, and these are identified as comforters in 2 Sam 10: 3.”\(^\text{17}\) He clarifies that “In a word, comforters are individuals who join the mourner for the mourning period, sharing the mourner’s appearance, locus, and ritual activity.”\(^\text{18}\) Although the mourners inevitably break the silence in terms of their audible weeping, their voice is not one raised to discuss about the death or its circumstances. Therefore, the employment of professional mourners does not contradict the idea of not speaking to the bereaved and trying to rationalise or correct their situation by the use of words.

**Speaking Pain**

From the moment one receives bereavement news about their loved one, their state of the mind can be altered, sometimes quite significantly.\(^\text{19}\) Larrimore elucidates that” some of Job’s strongest statements were uttered under the duress of grief and pain. We should understand that he was beside himself as he said them; in a real sense they were not his words at all. It was the pain speaking.”\(^\text{20}\) Seating on ash heaps and tearing of clothes; sackcloth attire and even wishing to die when absorbed in pondering the meaninglessness of life, are just examples of what happens in different


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 48-47.


death contexts. According to Morris Jastrow, “the employment of dust or earth in some way as a symbol of mourning is common”\(^{21}\) among ancient Hebrews. With such varied and extreme circumstances prevailing around the context of death and bereavement, the best reaction that would be useful for all is the presence of sympathetic humans but silent ones who do not add insult to injury by speech. As Job chastises his friends, “Oh that you would keep silent, and it would be your wisdom!”\(^{22}\)

**Speedy Grieving**

We must never try to take any short-cuts and to seek to end someone's grief abruptly. Hickman suggests that “the reassuring thing about grieving is that the process will not be cheated. It will take as much time as it needs.”\(^{23}\) With some relative enlightenment about the process of grief we can begin to appreciate the futility of attempts to introduce quick fixes in trying to speak recovery to those afflicted by the pain of losing their loved ones to death.

**Questions Raised by the Bereaved**

There are always a lot of questions that are raised by the mourning person which comforters need to be aware of in order to become more empathetic and even more sympathetic. Some of these questions have already been asked many times before and by many people who have experienced the same situation. Speaking of when Martha ran to met Jesus after her brother's death, Chuck Smith puts is thus:

> As she came to Him, she exclaimed, "Jesus, if you had only been here earlier, my brother would not have died!" She was disappointed in Him. In a polite way she

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\(^{22}\) Job 13:5

was rebuking Him by saying, "What took you so long to get here? Lord, where were you when we needed you? Why didn't you respond to our prayers? You could have prevented death and averted our sorrow and grief? Why didn't you?" Isn't it interesting that we still ask Him the same questions when a loved one dies today.24

Job also asks some of the questions and God Himself answers Job or rather, challenges him without giving specific answers. Meaning that for some questions we will not necessarily find the answers. Not even directly from God Himself. Or rather, for some questions the answers are not to be demanded from God as was done by Job. Not even the humans in form of Job's friends could with wisdom decipher concealed answers.

With a full knowledge of humanity's limitations, we will still venture to attempt to provide some solutions for those who may find themselves engulfed by grief. Yet in our solution provision, we would still emphasize that nobody should attempt to prescribe these solutions to anyone who is bereaved. Only what the Scriptures say we should say should be said, and only when invited to speak by the bereaved. Otherwise the solutions should be available only should the bereaved themselves seek them. And they should not be given in a judgemental and authoritative manner as was done by Job's friends.

In a manner of speaking, Job ponders over the question of why he as a righteous man should be suffering so much. He states that he knows no cause for his present misery as he fires up these two questions in succession: “Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man

whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?" The overarching question here really is 'why?'. Job as any human befallen by calamity rightly longs to know why. The only true answer that anyone can give is that God knows why. As Thomas Aquinas says, “in God there is no accident. The premises are proved thus. Everything is found more excellently in cause than in effect. But God is cause of all: therefore whatever is in Him is found there in the most excellent way possible. But what most perfectly attaches to a thing is the very thing itself.” If anyone asks us why bad things are happening to them, our best response ought to be an admission that we do not know and really cannot tell them why but that God knows why. Any attempt to give reasons is just conjuncture and misrepresents God and His character and should thus be avoided. Which is another strong reason why our silence in the audience of the grieving is of prime importance.

The failure to keep silence in the presence of a griever, culminating in the response of Eliphaz to Job's outcry, is a devastating one. It presents leading questions of a rhetorical nature that appear to disregard the destructive nature that the speaker knows them to have, because he starts by asking Job if he would be grieved to hear his response. So Eliphaz sounds so upset that he cannot keep himself from speaking and saying things that he knows will grieve his friend even more than he is already grieving:

Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness

25 Job 3:20 -23

of thy ways? Remember, I pray thee, who everperished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?**27**

While the question of the suffering of just and innocent people always remains on people's minds, it is downright cruel to strive to make any grieving person to admit guilt. It is even more cruel that this effort to obtain the confession is being made by a friend. And Job states it fittingly that by their words and behaviour towards him they are “digging a pit for a friend.”**28** The reader of the book of Job feels the pain as Job the man is subjected to the ruthlessness of his own friends. The pain for the reader is felt because the reader knows that the answer of the questions being asked by Eliphaz. The answer is yes, innocent people can also suffer for reasons best known to God. This is the model answer for all who suffer and all who will in future suffer and ask the question, “can innocent people suffer?” Exactly when the answer may be used, calls for great wisdom and great discretion.

The greatest question to be answered is one which inevitably has been asked before and one which is often a despairing question: “Where is God now?” Fortunately this question pretty much covers many of the questions asked by Job to God Himself. So we have the privilege of learning our answer directly from the mouth of the divine. It is worth noting that even God keeps silent for a long time as Job complains on and on. Finally, when God Himself responds to Job He does not provide the answers as Job expects them but He speaks as only God can speak, with flaming questions that only God can ask:

> Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner...

**27** Job 4:3-7  
**28** Job 6:27
stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed? Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place; That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it?²⁹

The sheer power in the answer from God to Job given by his questions is enough to put Job and any of us today as readers at peace. From reading God's response in Job chapter 38 one cannot but cease to distress over the question about where is God when we suffer. When one reads the words God speaks to Job one is brought into a state of calmness and satisfaction about God being in control. The response of God is sufficient to overwhelm every doubt that any humans can have regarding their grief and helplessness. So whenever we need to knock out some doubts about God's activities in our lives we need look no further than God's response to Job. We also need to just share this portion of Scripture to any who are grieving and need the reassurance of God's omnipresence.

**Children's Grief**

Sometimes comforters will need to comfort children in grief. Comforters may wonder, for those children who lose a parent to death: Who is God and where and how does He manifest Himself to them? White asks the same question:

And how does the Lord provide for these bereaved ones? He does not work a miracle in sending manna from heaven; He does not send ravens to bring them food; but He works a miracle upon human hearts, expelling selfishness from the soul and unsealing the fountains of benevolence. He tests the love of His professed followers by committing to their tender mercies the afflicted and bereaved ones.³⁰

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²⁹ Job 38:1-13

Comfort of for children in grief therefore largely lies in God's hands. It is God who works through people to be sympathetic and helpful to grieving children.

Healing Over Time

We should be aware as comforters that in time, the pain for the bereaved ceases to be an ever-present and continual one. But yet there will be events and moments of life that keep happening without any choice by the bereaved. Such memories are not necessarily about missing the deceased as much as they are about thinking of the fact that the deceased are no longer here to see the various things that have happened since they were gone. “The reality is we live with our grief. It is entirely natural that even years later there may be occasions, such as a wedding, when we experience a surge of grief. When we realize that someone we love is not there to share that moment. Simply put, there will be good days and bad days. There will be ups and downs.”

Anyone who has any sensitive heart at all should try not to speak to the bereaved about their pain. The time for God to completely heal all bereavements lies in the future at the second coming of Jesus when “God shall wipe all tears from their eyes.” The question of erasing pain from one’s memory is not one that anyone should be attempting to address. Thus, complete silence as a mode of supporting the bereaved is a desirable act. Trying to answer and solve the problems of one in grief will often result in nothing but exacerbating more grief.

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God's Will

For the bereaved, one important question that could be in their mind is, “Who is God to a widow or widower with children?” We need the reassurance that God is still there for us even though we may not feel it anymore. When we are swallowed up by grief, we need to feel His eternal presence and care for us. It is not even sensible to think that it is God’s will for instance to let a 2 year old girl and a 5 year old boy lose their loving mother. The thought alone is completely senseless. Therefore it is reasonable that we can have exceedingly great faith that God can turn a disease situation around for His own glory’s sake and for the sake of the children. We can pray with thankfulness for what God can do for us. We can even refuse to listen to any negative voices of those who do not believe that the ill person will be healed as a result of our prayer of faith. We can boldly ask people questions this way; “Do you think it is not God’s will to heal our loved one? To have two small children with their mother being alive to you Is not God’s will?”

Unanswered Questions

We need to come to understand that assuming that God will give us the answers we desire just because we have prayed is referred to as presumption. If death happens, as humans we should just accept bereavement as God allows it to occur, “If we are called upon to meet bereavement, let us accept the bitter cup, remembering that a Father’s hand holds it to our lips.”

Jobs friends could not answer any of Job’s questions. Most of the questions are asked over and over by each bereaved person in turn. Who can answer them satisfactorily except God? And who can even think they will never ask the same

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questions when they themselves are bereaved some day? The safest course of action therefore is being silent rather than attempting to answer difficult questions of which no humans can adequately answer. Still, in spite of human failure, as Larrimore correctly points out “Job’s friendships are the first part of his life to be restored after his calamity.”

Testimony

In this section, we focus on how to help the bereaved by giving them the opportunity to share their grief. The role of the comforter becomes that of a facilitator who enables grief to happen but at the same time allows the same grief to facilitate healing.

Sharing Grief With Others

There is an English expression that says 'a problem shared is a problem solved or a problem halved'. I wish I could say that this is true of sharing one's bereavement because then the more you share it the more other people take away part of the problem from you and the less you remain with. There may be some element of truth in this but perhaps only very little of it. In any case, “where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.”

As stated by Woltfelt, “Sharing your pain with others won't make it disappear, but it will, over time, make it more bearable. Reaching out for help also connects you to other people and strengthens the bonds of love that make life seem worth living again.”

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34 Proverbs 11:14

35 Alan D Woltfelt, Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing for Your Heart (Fort Collins: Companion Press, 2003), 126.
Empathy and a Chance to Speak

If someone who is bereaved and suffering from grief wants to speak out, they should always be allowed to speak. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. The words they say can help those who are listening to take a peek into their grieving soul. This in turn can inflict some pain on the listener and induce some empathy. “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” A human being must never suffer and feel alone, as “two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” Empathy is essentially what the grieving person needs from those who are around them. When they witness somebody else weep over their loss they will experience a degree of comfort. This is consistent with the Biblical writing that says rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep.

Undivided Attention

The moment that a bereaved person begins to speak they get undivided attention from their listeners. Everyone apparently wants to hear what they have to say. The silence in the presence of their voice is such that one could almost hear a pin drop. This is always true for all the times that anyone is given the audience to speak. It appears that by their knowledge of the fact that someone is bereaved, people want to hear more from them. Inasmuch as it is good that people want to listen attentively

36 Luke 6:45
37 Romans 12:4-5
38 Ecclesiastes: 4:9-10
39 Romans 12:15
to the grieving person, the same person is encouraged to speak. Everyone who speaks likes to be listened to. This, I imagine, was also typically the case with Job’s friends after the week of silence together with him. When a person is grieving, those of us who want to comfort them should be silent and by so doing motivate the griever to speak. By so doing we will “bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfil the law of Christ.”

Soothed by Public Speaking

The most useful outcome that is consequential to the speeches of the bereaved is that they have an effect of soothing their own grief. Not only does speaking help them gradually decrease their own distress but it also enables the listeners to begin to understand the feelings of the grieving person.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked. That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

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40 Galatians 6:2

41 2 Corinthians 12:12-27
What could prove a useful form of relief for anyone as they grieved is sharing positive words and encouraging others who may have also been afflicted by grief. “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

In their worst moments of hurt, they can find a way to highlight the goodness of God to them. As Paul says, “May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.”

One can, for instance, feel accepted as they explained all about the wonderful life they have lived with God’s providence until the point in time when their loved one becomes ill. They can speak of what transpires during their loved one's illness and how God is still gentle and good to them even through to the sad moments of death. As stories of trials and faith in Christ are shared, there will be many who wish to hear them in solidarity and empathy. “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

Hickman suggests that mourning is an integral part of everyone's life whose outcome is certain. She says that to mourn is to be comforted, but she observes that we would all like to turn away from mourning as quickly as we can because mourning

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42 1 Pet 4:11

43 Romans 15:5-7 (New Living Translation)

44 Hebrews 13:1-2 (New International Version)
itself is not something comfortable for us.\textsuperscript{45} Further, she says that when we help each other we forget, if only for a few moments, about our own primary consuming need. to help another is to forget, for a few moments at least, one’s own primary consuming need.\textsuperscript{46} Besides what people do around the bereaved, the question that becomes important for a grieving person is how to endure the suffering. As nobody can take away the pain for them or even feel it for them or the same way as they do, they must go through the pain themselves. Nobody can take it away from them or feel it for them in their place. Nobody except of cause the one who created them. But how does the process of transferring or sharing the pain with the creator work? Is it even real? Firstly, “The compassionate person may indeed suffer by entering the situation of the sufferer, but his suffering must never simply be the same as that of the sufferer.”\textsuperscript{47}

On one hand, people can help by being there and listening to the person who is grieving without interrupting them or commenting. On the other hand the bereaved person needs to talk and say all they feel like saying. They ought to be allowed to weep and mourn as they feel like. Hickman agrees when she says that to telling our story is a way of affirming the life of the one we have lost and all the experiences that we had together and the favourite family stories. She says that telling the story is also a way of moving the grief along, and hence it contributes to our own healing. Yet, she continues, it is also a gift to others, when in addition to telling the shared story of the life that has passed we also tell our own story in relation to the event. When we relate how we got through the grief and say our fears and our panics plus all that helped us


\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{47} Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth eds., \textit{The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought} (New York: Oxford University, 2004), 10.
we help others to also cope someday. She also says that we can also give the details of any moments that we feel that we felt the 'light break through' and what that was like.\(^{48}\) Noel and Blair also agree by stating that “A sense of community and acceptance is vital to our spiritual and emotional healing.”\(^{49}\)

**Active Listening and Incompetent Physicians**

Psychotherapists and professional counsellors hardly ever talk or prescribe any advice to anyone by speaking to them about anything. They usually just let their client speak and say many things as they feel like speaking while the counsellors just ask leading questions and guide the client to say more. According to Palmer, “a key counselling skill is active listening which involves the conscious discipline of setting aside one's own preoccupations in order to concentrate as fully as possible on what the other person is expressing.”\(^{50}\) No wonder Job resorts to calling his friends incompetent physicians because they fail on this very important aspect of counselling. In fact Palmer goes on to say that the counsellors' listening may usually involve a high level of self awareness of one's prejudices and idiosyncrasies.\(^{51}\)

**Explicit Biblical Guidance**

There is some Biblical guidance that should inform conduct in times of sorrow. The Bible explicitly counsels us not to mourn as those who do not believe, who have no hope.\(^{52}\) Even if someone mourns as one who has no hope we should not

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\(^{48}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{49}\) Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair, *I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping, and Healing After the Sudden Death of a Loved One*, Updated ed. (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2008), 42.


\(^{51}\) Ibid., 20.

\(^{52}\) 1 Thessalonians 4:13
place ourselves in the position of trying to interfere with their mourning as only they can feel the distress and pain of the death affecting them. So we should allow someone to mourn as they would like to mourn. If we are explicitly asked by them to comment, then we should point them back to the Scriptures. Presenting our own opinions and judgements about the situation or trying to gain theological mileage to win them over to my way of thinking in their time of grief is neither wise nor moral. It is also quite destructive and dangerous for the relationship with the bereaved individual.

For the grieving individual, wrecked by a myriad of questions in the seemingly senseless situation the Bible has several answers. Many of the questions have already been raised before and hence already have also been answered. God gave Job the existential answer that should silence any more questioning by asking him, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” The fact that the Bible has the answer does not however prevent each person struck by grief from asking the same questions, albeit in a different form.

Reassurance by Jesus

The suffering person has in fact a lot of reassurance by Jesus himself through the Scriptures. In Revelation 2 in the message to Smyrna, which is also a message to all who find themselves persecuted as the church in Smyrna was, Jesus tells us that we should not fear death as He already conquered death.⁵³ And in the book of John, Jesus says that he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.⁵⁴

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⁵³ Rev 2:8
⁵⁴ 1 John 11:25
The only one who is truly qualified to comfort us in our moments of grief is the one who died and rose again and who himself knows us best. He who knows our strengths and our weaknesses happens to be the one who can tell when we are about to become extinguished by the situations we get into. After all He is the one who “walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.”\(^\text{55}\) He knows us better than even we know or understand ourselves.

**God’s Word**

A search into the Bible for verses that give comfort to the bereaved strengthens my argument even more that the role of comforting is really and truly a domain for God alone. This section provides some verses of Scripture that show how, as comforters, without using our own words we can share God’s word directly from The Bible with someone who is grieving. We can quote the words from the Lord: “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”\(^\text{56}\)

**Psalms of Comfort**

The Psalmist invites us to cast away all our fears always: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”\(^\text{57}\) This means that even when we encounter moments of losing loved ones to death or when we feel our own lives on earth are

\(^{55}\) Rev 1:12  
^{56}\) Joshua 1:9  
^{57}\) Psalm 23:4
about to end we should not be afraid because the Lord will comfort us. This Scripture is one to be claimed for those who are bereaved as part of the comforting and re-energizing divine sources.

Particularly for the moments when someone is broken hearted the psalmists reminds them, “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

The text, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble “ is given in plural format which depicts God as 'our' refuge and strength. A refuge is a place where one goes or flees to when they are in trouble and when their life is under threat. God is therefore given here as a place to which one escapes danger. But it is difficult to tangibly depict in a clear and unequivocal manner just how God provides this refuge to every individual. Strangely, there are numerous views of how people perceive God. Some, view him as someone who will be present in their days of trouble but yet they want to have nothing to do with Him in their days of happiness. Others recognise that evil and good must coexist for the justice of God to be demonstrated in the end. We need to claim the promise that He will be our refuge and that therefore when we are grieving, He will be ever present.

In grief, people feel physically weak and often do complain about feeling this way. A text of Scripture that could be presented to them for encouragement and uplifting is “My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” It is also a reassuring thing to know this about God that “He

58 Psalm 34:18
59 Psalm 46:1
60 Psalm 73:26
healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”  

Psalm 147:3

When one is grieving they have a broken heart and they feel severely wounded. And these are words that can soothe their wounded heart.

Comfort Through Fear of the Future

As a widow or widower, one can remain extremely lonely and weakened. Friends and neighbours and people from the local community and church can come to comfort but very soon they will all be gone back to their busy lives. One will remain perhaps with just some little children who were looking up to them and not knowing what they would do and indeed being afraid of the future. These words of promise, from the Lord come through Isaiah and urge them on thus, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”  

Isaiah 41:10

They can helped one to be stronger when they are weak. They can be used with grieving individuals to spur them on.

Death Allowed for a Reason Only Known by God

Sometimes “the righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.”  

Isaiah 57:1-2

We may not understand why some people whom we consider righteous are taken away from us by death. Kealy points out that “Suffering, barrenness, even early death, are not necessarily evil because God is the vindicator of

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61 Psalm 147:3  
62 Isaiah 41:10  
63 Isaiah 57:1-2
the poor, honest person.” And it is even possible that they are taken away to prevent them from encountering some evil that is yet to come. This Scripture could provide divine comfort in times of grief and can be shared by comforters with the bereaved.

A very precious text to those who love God says, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” This enables one to surrender everything to God and be at peace knowing that whatever is happening even in moments of pain has been allowed by God for the good of those who love Him. It could also be used by comforters to soothe the pain of the grieving.

Putting on Immortality

A reassuring passage of Scripture tells us about the resurrection and translation into heavenly beings. It reassures us of the final victory that awaits those who love God. It is a very dramatic explanation of the event that shall take place at the last trumpet:

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible will have put on incorruption, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then what is written will happen: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage can help in the healing process when one is going through bereavement and comforters could provide this scripture.

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65 Romans 8:28

66 1 Corinthians 15:52-57 (Web Version)
Finally, when we know that someone is being bothered by the questions that mainly start with 'why', we could let them be awed by God's mighty answer to Job's questions. We could give them a glimpse of God's power shown by His counter-questions as recorded in Job 38. Writing about this chapter, Cox shows the parallel between Genesis 1:9 in which God says the waters under heaven should be gathered into one place and Job 3:8-11 which he calls a paraphrase of the same and points out the magnificence of the paraphrase. He says that even though the earth may seem orderless and chaotic with clouds and mists as garments as well as untamable oceans they are all under law to God. God's creation cannot overstep the bounds that he made for it. This Cox points out, is how Job came to reverence the works and wonders of God.\textsuperscript{67} If God's questions to Job, cannot suffice to quench the questioning mind of a bereaved person then probably nothing much else that is Biblical will. Indeed they “pierce Job to the heart, cutting sheer through all his assumptions of wisdom, and feelingly persuade him of his ignorance and of his weakness.”\textsuperscript{68} Otherwise only prayer and the willingness of the person to cooperate with the Holy Spirit would help them move away from their state of doubt over a period of time.

\textbf{Resting From Labours}

While we are not to judge who dies in the Lord or not, as the ones who want to comfort the grieving we can, when we have been informed by their loved ones that the deceased is believed to have died in the Lord, simply share “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works

\textsuperscript{67} Samuel Cox, \textit{A Commentary on Job}, 2nd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Company, 1885), 642.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 645.
do follow them.”⁶⁹ Alongside that verse we could also share, “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”⁷⁰

God Wipes Tears

A most reassuring and solemn verse that comforters can provide to any bereaved person who believes in God and who will find delight and comfort in is: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”⁷¹ Anyone who knows the pain of death will embrace the promise of no more crying and no more sorrow and death and so we can share this with them.

Therefore we should only use words, when invited by the bereaved to do so to share the comfort from God.

Songs in Moment of Grief

This chapter presents lyrics taken from ten different song writers whose writings could provide some degree of comfort to people in grief. The songs' words in place of talking to the bereaved may be a much more welcome alternative to them. A comforter could use these songs as an aid to consoling the bereaved. It may not always be possible for the comforter to sing them but providing recorded singing or access to it or just the lyrics in these songs could go a long way in helping the bereaved.

⁶⁹ Revelation 14:13
⁷⁰ Psalm 116:15
⁷¹ Revelation 21:4
⁷² The melody and music behind each of the songs also could be soothing but unfortunately there is no way to capture such melody into writing.
In Moments Like These

The background behind the lyrics and authorship of the song, “In moments like these” is unclear with David Graham being attributed as the author by Hymnary.org.73

In grief, Job fell down and worshipped saying that the Lord had given and taken away.74 It could well be that when one is grief stricken they too can burst into song and worship. They could consider these words written by Graham but presented by Don Marsh, “In moments like these I sing out a song, I sing out a love song to Jesus. In moments like these I lift up my hands, I lift up my hands to the Lord. Singing I love You, Lord, Singing I love You, Lord, Singing I love You, Lord, I love You”.75 The praise words within this writing could be a soothing balm for the pain experienced in grief.

In Times Like These

Osbeck relates the story behind the authorship of the song, “In times like these”:

This meaningful and popular gospel song has been a favorite with God’s people, since it was first written during the height of World War II. It was written in the midst of a busy housewife’s day and came, said its author, as a direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Mrs. Jones related that all she did was write down what was given to her from God Himself. Though it was written as a response to the stresses and strains of wartime living, yet it has been used and appropriated by many of God’s children for their particular difficult situations. It has been used in almost every kind of unusual pressure in the Christian life: for funerals, missionary departures, and as a source of challenge to those who are far from God and need His personal salvation.76

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74 Job 1:20-21


76 Kenneth W. Osbeck, 101 More Hymn Stories (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1985), 149–150.
What Jones writes may bring calmness and comfort to someone when she says “In times like these I have a Savior. In times like these I have an anchor. I'm very sure my anchor holds and grips the solid rock. This rock is Jesus. Yes, He's the one. This rock is Jesus. The only one. I'm very sure. My anchor holds and grips the solid rock.” The moments of grief are moments when most people would agree that they do need a Saviour. This in place of talking would be a delightful experience at a sad moment.

Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah

Osbeck writes about the hymn “Guide me o thou great Jehovah” and says:

The imagery of the hymn is drawn wholly from the Bible. The hymn compares the forty-year journey of the Israelites to the promised land with the living of a Christian life as a “pilgrim[age] through this barren land.” Note the symbolic phrases used throughout: “bread of heaven” (manna), “crystal fountain” (1 Corinthians 10:3, 4), “fire and cloudy pillar,” “verge of Jordan,” “Canaan’s Side.”

As one feels the pain of grief with physical weakness they could appreciate a guide as offered by the hymn writer Williams:

Guide me o thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but you are mighty. Hold me with your powerful hand. Bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore. Open now the crystal fountain, where the healing waters flow. Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through. Strong Deliverer, ever be my strength and shield. When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside. Death of death, and hell's Destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side. Songs of praises, I will ever sing to you.

Williams here shows Jehovah as the mighty one when one is weak. He also portrays Him as one with the ability to release healing waters from the crystal fountain. In addition Jehovah is shown to be able to provide guidance via a pillar of fire and a cloud and also one who can destroy anxiety, hell and even death.

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78 Kenneth W. Osbeck, 101 Hymn Stories (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1982), 81–82

Does Jesus Care?

Osbeck relates the story behind how Frank Graeff came to write the song, “Does Jesus care?”:

In spite of his outwardly-cheery disposition and winsome personality, Graeff was often called upon to go through severe testing experiences in his life. It was while passing through such a test and experiencing severe despondency, doubt and physical agony, that Mr. Graeff wrote this text. He turned to the Scriptures for solace and strength.

To experience times of questions and even doubts regarding the nearness of God, as Frank Graeff did in the verses of this hymn, is only human and normal. It is only as a believer comes through such a struggle, however, with the firm conviction as Mr. Graeff did in the chorus of this hymn, “O yes He cares, I know He cares,” that a child of God can be truly victorious.  

A possibility exists that the bereaved could, under distress ask about God's love for them. They may even say that they think that Jesus does not care about them. Graeff reassuring asks and answers thus:

Does Jesus care when my way is dark, with a nameless dread and fear? As the daylight fades, into deep night shades, does He care enough to be near? When I’ve tried and failed To resist some temptation strong. When for my deep grief, there is no relief, though my tears flow all the night long. When I’ve said “goodbye” to the dearest on earth to me, and my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks, Is it aught to Him, does He see? O yes He cares. I know He cares. His heart is touched with my grief. When my days are weary the long nights dreary I know my saviour cares.  

To know that God's heart is touched when we grieve is something that can help the bereaved to begin the process of healing as they accept by faith that divinity suffers with humanity.

Through It All

Though the history behind the song is not readily available online, Andrae Crouch also captures the moments of grief's thoughts when he writes about the many

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80 Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1982), 81–82

tears and sorrows and questions for tomorrow. He speaks of those been times he did not know right from wrong. And how in every situation, God gave blessed consolation, that his trials would come to only make him strong. Through it all, he says he has learned to trust in Jesus and learned to trust in God. Also he says that he has learned to depend upon His word. He goes on to say that he has been to a lot of places and seen a lot of faces but there were times felt like he was left all alone. But in his lonely hours, which he calls precious lonely hours, Jesus lets him know that he was His own. Then Crouch thanks God for the mountains, and for the valleys and for the storms He brought him through. He says that because if had never had the problems, then he would not have known that God could solve them, and he would have never known what faith in God could do. His perspective could help one who is grieving to focus their minds on God's past providences as a reassurance that He will carry them through present trials and hence should be trusted in present grief also.

It Is Well With My Soul

The writing by Spafford which was inspired by his own grief invokes the mind to a pacific scene by the waterside:

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 with my soul. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control, that Christ hath regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed His own blood for my soul. And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight. The clouds be rolled back as a scroll. The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend, Even so, it is well with my soul.


In a moment when one is engulfed by sorrow it is a difficult thing to think that everything is well. But with the inspiration from the lyrics by Spafford it could be a fitting response to moments of hardship.

Gentle Shepherd

Macintyre gives a detailed background of the song “Gentle Shepherd” by Bill Gaither and says:

Of all the biblical images for Jesus, that of a shepherd to the flock is one of the most endearing and enduring. There are numerous attributes of a shepherd: leader, provider, guardian, protector, healer, defender, and others. Gloria Gaither’s opening two words set the image for this song with the modifier “gentle.” Gentle Shepherd implies a set of characteristics included in the verbs of the text: lead, find our way, feed, give strength, enable. With simple phrases, the text describes one aspect of the relationship between the Shepherd and the sheep – between Jesus and the church.84

In this hymn Gloria Gaither invites the Lord as the gentle shepherd, saying there is no other to whom anyone can turn and using such words that can provide much needed rejuvenation: “Gentle Shepherd come and lead us. For we need you to help us find our way. Gentle Shepherd come and feed us. For we need your strength from day to day. There's no other we can turn to. Who can help us face another day. Gentle Shepherd come and lead us. For we need to you to help us find our way. There's no other we can turn to who can help us face another day. Gentle Shepherd come and lead us for we need to you to help us find our way.” 85 As doubtlessly one will feel lost and despondent in grief, they are likely to appreciate a shepherd who can help them find their way again.


Abide With Me

Writing about the hymn by “Abide with me”, Osbeck says:

Henry Lyte’s inspiration for writing “Abide with Me” came shortly before his final sermon, while reading from the account in Luke 24 of our Lord’s appearance with the two disciples on their seven mile walk from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus on that first Easter evening. How the hearts of those discouraged disciples suddenly burned within them when they realized that they were in the company of the risen, the eternal Son of God!  

So Lyte prayerfully writes:

Abide with me, fast falls the even tide. The darkness deepens, Lord, with me abide. When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, help of the helpless, O abide with me. Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away. Change and decay in all around I see. O Thou who changest not, abide with me. I need thy presence every passing hour. What but thy grace can foil the tempter’s power? Who like thyself my guide and stay can be? Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me!  

Profoundly, in the moments when all other helpers will fail and when comforters will even run away, the invitation for God to abide with the bereaved can become a significant relief.

The Day Thou Gavest

Hawn narrates how the hymn was written to facilitate in thanksgiving for blessings during the day and request a safe rest at night where sleep was seen as could be a transition to death. He explains how the hymn was written in 1870 for missionary meetings then revised and published in 1871 with the heading “Their office was to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at even.” He also

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88 1 Chronicles. 23:30
tells how it was later, in 1889 associated with Psalm 113:3: “From the rising of the sun until the going down of the same the Lord’s name is to be praised.”

The hymn author, Ellerton acknowledging the end of day says “The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended; The darkness falls at Thy behest; To Thee our morning hymns ascended, Thy praise shall sanctify our rest. As o'er each continent and island The dawn leads on another day, And hour by hour fresh lips are making Thy wondrous doings heard on high.” With the knowledge that another day will dawn again the bereaved may be at peace for the moment as they receive comfort from the words of this hymn.

**Great Is Thy Faithfulness**

Finally, declaring that God does not change and that He has provided all that is needed day by day, Chisholm paints a God whose faithfulness is great. According to Osbeck Chisholm wrote the hymn following his morning by morning realisation of God's goodness:

In a letter dated 1941, Mr. Chisholm writes, “My income has not been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years which has followed me on until now. Although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness.” Chisholm says that God's compassion never fails and even the nature and the seasons join in witnesses to this fact. He says that God's own presence will cheer and guide and

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provide the strength needed for today and a bright hope for tomorrow.\textsuperscript{93} These words would certainly bring comfort to any who trust in God and is receptive and attentive to the words.

\textbf{Prayer}

\textit{Desperately Needed Prayer}

Prayer for the bereaved by the comforter could probably be the only thing that even an atheist may accept. Nonetheless, even if they object to prayer with them they would benefit from prayer offered for them even in their absence. Otherwise even the simple gesture of someone who comes to mourn with them could also be helpful. The presence of another caring human being who needs not speak any words but sits with the sorrowful may comfort. According to Parr, “The first thing that every person who is dealing with a loss desperately needs, is your prayers. Not just you praying for them but more importantly you praying with them. There is something encouraging that happens when you lay your hands on somebody, and they hear you praying and crying out to God on their behalf.”\textsuperscript{94} Indeed, prayer can help the grieving and strengthens them onward beyond depression.

\textbf{Faith and Prayer}

When we pray in faith for the grieving we can be certain that God will minister to them in their pain. White proposes that both faith and prayer should be studied together as they are closely allied. She says that there is a divine science in prayer in the prayer of faith that all must understand if they would make their lifework of success: Further, in citing Christ in Mark 11:24, “What things soever ye desire,


when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” She shows how our asking must plainly be done according to God's will for the things that God has promised. So that whatever we receive must be used in doing God's will. Therefore when the conditions set by God are met, the fulfilment of His promise is also unequivocal. As Haberman asserts, “Prayer, whatever its content, is an expression of trust in God. It passes through the channel that connects us with God.” And so because God has promised not to leave us nor forsake us we can confidently intercede in prayer for those struck by grief. Wiles suggests that “Christ's power is released by the network of mutual intercessory prayers.” Therefore we must pray diligently for those who are grieving.

Intercessory Prayer

Even medical professionals who have experienced the effects of prayer have scientifically proven that remote intercessory prayer works for their patients. According to Leibovici, “Remote, retroactive intercessory prayer said for a group is associated with a shorter stay in hospital and shorter duration of fever in patients with a bloodstream infection and should be considered for use in clinical practice.”

In intercessory praying, according to Wiles, the intercessor acts on behalf of someone but at the same time is responsible to a God who is both against and for them, in judgement as well as in mercy. So the intercessor stands bother apart from

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the one they are praying for as well as for them. There is a lot of surprise and wonder, say Bell and Townsend, within those stories where prayer serves to influence positive transformation of lives. Such stories provide a stimulus for the approaching of God's throne boldly because of the evident power and love graphically displayed ion other people's lives. While it is easy to list prayer as something to be done for the grieving it is equally important to point out how to pray. With reference to prayer, Orphans First observes that there are many people who pray haphazardly by saying just a few quick words in the morning then during the whole day they do not say anything to God. Finally in the night before going to sleep they again say a few things to God in sleepiness. This is shown to be not how Jesus gave the example of prayer when He said to pray continually. This, they explain, is not to imply that every minute of each day is to be spent on the knees but rather a prayerful attitude showing dependence on God should be acknowledged at all times and obedience and talking to Him should take place throughout the day. Therefore prayer should be given to God at the start of every day. God, who loves us, has promised to hear us when we pray.

Therefore for our prayers for the grieving to be effective we need to pray continually as the Scriptures say. We need to keep praying for the grieving on an ongoing basis rather than just once in a while. We need not to engage in much talking


101 Orphans First is the name of a website whose full reference is given at the end of the citation.

102 1 Thessalonians 5:17

to the bereaved but to offer much prayer for them. Even White points out that there are many people who fail to receive the blessing of a real communion with God even though they do have their seasons of devotion. This is because they are too much in a hurry. They really do not have any time to be with the divine teacher. They pause for a very short time in their prayer and then rush back to their work, without waiting for counsel from Christ. So they return to their work with their burdens as they were before the prayer.

There is a secret of strength that these people must learn or otherwise they can never attain the highest success. It is important for them to give themselves time to think, to pray and to wait upon God for the renewal of mental, physical and spiritual power. They have a need of the uplifting influence of the Spirit of God. When they receive this then they will be quickened by fresh life. Their tired brain and weary bodies will be refreshed and their hearts will be lighter as the burdens in the heart will have been lifted.  

Pray, the Gift is in the Promise

The need to pray for the bereaved demands that we also pray well and be in proper communion with God and not just utter a haphazard prayer. We need not to pray in haste and thus the grief of the afflicted will be easier for them to bear. We can always be certain about the fact that God will answer our prayers. “For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christ like temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received.” Also, “we need look for


105 Ibid., 318.
no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most.”106 So when we offer to pray for the bereaved we will with confidence know that God will answer our prayers for them and help them to feel better. By praying for others we will also strengthen our relationship with God. Even as we pray, we must be grateful as Keller points out, “Gratitude bonds a person to the Giver; it is a natural part of prayer that bonds us to God.”107 As we experience God’s power in comforting the grieving for whom we pray, we will essentially pray with gratitude and thanks to God and we will further cement our relationship with Him. I assert that prayer is critical for the bereaved and it is far more effective in helping them heal as opposed to talking to the bereaved which could result in saying the wrong things that can deepen the pain for the grieving rather than lighten it.

106 Ibid., 318.

CHAPTER 4

HOW THE BEREAVED COULD RESPOND

Thankfulness: An Apt Response to Tragedy

We will now focus directly on the bereaved and how they could respond to the event of loss of their loved one rather than on the comforters' role. Yet as comforters we can be equipped with information about the thankfulness strategy and provide it to our friend who may specifically ask for help and thereby place a demand on us to break away from our silent method.

Why Me?

One question many people may ask themselves when bereavement confronts them is why it has happened to them and not to anyone else. When I think of this genuine question that comes from deep pain, I think also of the other more thankful question someone could ask; “Why me Lord, what have I ever done to deserve even one of the pleasures I've known?”\(^1\) Another way to consider it would be to imagine that when one thinks of why bad should be for them also they are wishing bad for other people. Viewing things this way could help retract this kind of thought if the thinker is not a person who likes to wish bad and evil on others.

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Blessed Be the Name of the Lord

Taking a leaf out of Job's reaction could help someone handle their own grief in a more positive way but still allow them to grieve as they must grieve. Hickman agrees as she suggests that “Job continues to have this kind of personal appeal for people who find themselves suffering great and inexplicable sorrow and pain.”

There is no question that Job is deeply perplexed and shocked when he hears the news of the demise of his children as he reacts; “Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshipped. And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

Job reacts by showing his distress and yet in the same instance he falls to the ground and worships and blesses the name of the Lord. The next verse after Job pronounces that the Lord gave and has taken away says, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.” Job blesses the name of the Lord in the same breath as he states that it is the Lord who has taken away. By this he acknowledges that whatever happens, even though it could be by the devil has been permitted to occur by God as nothing can happen in this world without God allowing it to. Piper and Taylor point out that “it was not sinful or wrong for Job to claim that God had a sovereign, ordaining hand in these evils. God did not do them; Satan did. But the evils that Satan did, he did only with God’s permission, which the Scriptures themselves imply amounts to God’s foreordination. Satan did these things to harm Job, but God

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3 Job 1:20-21 (English Standard Version)

4 Job 1:22 (English Standard Version)
ordained them for his own glory and ultimately for Job’s good.”⁵ Piper makes the emphasis that “Satan cannot do anything apart from God’s sovereign permission, which is governed by God’s infinite wisdom and covenant love.”⁶ So by extension it is God who has taken away what He gave in the first place.

Not As I Will But As You Will

In the acceptance of the situation, what Job prays is essentially saying to God, “Thy will be done.”⁷ He is acknowledging that God knows best what to do. He is submitting his own will, even though it hurts him so much, to the will of God. When Jesus is in deep agony, he prays “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”⁸ Jesus is also in a moment of deep suffering, pain and agony. Yet even in that pain He says “not as I will but as you will”.

In Every Thing Give Thanks

There is nothing wrong with wanting good for ourselves. But we must remain thankful to God even when we receive the bad. We must acknowledge that God knows what is best for us and by faith accept that He is still in control of all the situations. It is His will that we pray for to be done in our lives. And it is His will for us to be thankful in everything as He reveals this will to us by saying, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”⁹ This attitude

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⁵ John Piper, and Justin Taylor eds., Suffering and the Sovereignty of God, eds. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006), 64

⁶ John Piper, When the Darkness Will Not Lift: Doing What We Can While We Wait for God--and Joy (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 57.

⁷ Matthew 6:10

⁸ Matthew 26:39 (English Standard Version)

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:18
of thankfulness is not to be confined only to pleasant situations but to all things pleasant and unpleasant.

Thanks Given Under Bad Circumstances

An example of someone who is thankful even in unpleasant circumstances is Daniel. Daniel is unhappy that a decree has been signed that stipulates that emperor worship is now mandatory and at the same time takes away the liberty to worship God. Yet his reaction to this news is amazing and ought to strengthen our resolve to be thankful and worshipful in all situations: “Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.” 10 Daniel is still giving thanks before his God as before. Therefore we ought to understand that our thankfulness to God should not only be in times of joy but also in times of sorrow. The moments of grief are times at which we need to be thankful to God just as we would have been doing before such moments come upon us. This does not take away mourning but it helps us to cope. It is an act of obedience to God whose will is for us to give thanks in all things, not necessarily for all things but for His judgement.

Accepting the Bitter Cup with Thanks

So even as we face death we must remain thankful and “accept the bitter cup, remembering that a Father’s hand holds it to our lips.” 11 The response of thankfulness in tragedy requires no words to be spoken by the comforters. It does not call for us to prompt anyone to be thankful or to try to give them cues about how to react. If they

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10 Daniel 6:10 (New American Standard Bible)

should ask us what to do then our role is to point the to the Scriptures that show this reaction as an appropriate one. Thus we do not become condemnatory to those who need our love and care at their time of deepest need.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

Conclusion

Comforting the bereaved is best achieved by being with them but in complete silence. Silence only to the extent that as a comforter one is not leading the bereaved into any conversation. While silence must be observed, it should not be the stubbornness kind of silence that fails to respond to any talking by the bereaved. It is good to allow the bereaved to speak and as a comforter to be a good listener who offers no solution to the death problem or advice on how to grieve. Silence is the best solution because it is non-judgemental and universally applicable for all people regardless of what they believe. It enables even those who do not have anything to say to participate in the role of comforter.

The most critical aspect of helping the grieving is being around them. The Bible says that pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.\(^1\) God Himself cares about the grieving and so he defines pure religion as the act of comforting those who grieve. Even though they messed up in their words, by visiting Job, his friends did the right thing that a grieving person needs. Hence if we are to practice pure and undefiled religion, we ought indeed to visit the afflicted. We ought to care about them and to help them with their needs. It is however not part of

\(^1\) James1:27
our mandate under the guise of pure and undefiled religion to pontificate and attempt to present dogma or some words of wisdom. Our only and simple task is to visit, to care and be kind in order to help brighten the dark moments that the bereaved are experiencing. As practitioners of pure and undefiled religion we can listen to the bereaved as they speak to us but yet our own main activity in the visit should never be to talk. In the domain of comforting, the one who has knowledge uses words with restraint and even fools are thought to be wise if they keep silent. Indeed, silence is better than words in moments of grief.

To develop the study further, it may be beneficial to could look into how to help people from other religions besides Christians and also other societies. Also it would be useful to look further into other non-verbal ways of helping the grieving such as practical acts of kindness and compile a toolkit from which mankind could benefit from the comfort of God's people.

Further Study

For the scope of this paper I have focussed on silence in the process of comforting the mourning person from the perspective of Job. However, I am aware that there are various religions and beliefs that encompass the anthropological spread of humanity. Death affects all indiscriminately. Therefore, I must assume that everyone grieves in their respective ways. This calls for the extending work into this aspect in detail by examining the processes that are followed by others. Once their mourning processes have been explored, the role of silence will then be to focus on how it fits into their mourning meaning and processes. The way forward is as outlined below:

2 Proverbs 17:27-28
• Further studies into the known religions and beliefs who have recorded their processes could be embarked on: I am aware that there will be other religions that might be emerging or that have not yet recorded any processes. This will therefore limit the study to those religions and beliefs that have something recorded on all possible media, like books and audio-visuals. At an advanced level and stage, with right knowledge and expertise, oral tradition will be considered, bearing in mind that this will be a field research and it is a future projection, it will be achievable. The finding will enhance the understanding of the role of silence because all people can afford it.
  ◦ Just because someone is silent, it does not mean that their emotional communication is internally latent. In other words, there are intellectual thoughts that cannot be silenced by sealing the mouth. This aspect reveals that this study is as deep as it is wide in its different facets. Yet intentional silence can be understood within the limitations of pondering how much harm it can prevent.
  ◦ At the same time, I am faced with the prospect that there may exist, among humans, where silence may have been already labelled or declared as undesirable during the mourning process. My assumption is that just as wailing was noted to be the sign of mourning, factoring the mourners that were hired, there exists the possibility that the opposite is true.
  ◦ Considering the above, the study will then factor in the prospects of the role of silence where it is acceptable and its meaning where it shall be rejected. This will enable me to know better how this process can be recommended: this also is without limitations. Mourning cannot be
taught as a priority subject, just as life insurance and will writing can be overlooked death strikes.

- Nonetheless, I am bearing in mind that there are mass deaths that have taken place due to terrorism and other societal mass deaths and diseases like ebola that call for mass mourning, these will all be part of embraces aspects as one searched deeper into the silence role and whether it is achievable. For instance, when Nelson Mandela died people mourned in centres. One will ponder such events.

- In the UK, the death of Diana, princess of Wales is still mourned using the moment of silence. Furthermore, most events are mourned or recognised through the moment of silence, sometimes called a minute of silence. Therefore, one will have to consider how many countries practise this in the world.

Also, there is an aspect of silence when one is praying, silence when one person is speaking, silence when recollects some thoughts after disturbing events, even God silenced Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist when he did not believe that he will have a son at his old age! Silence, seemingly does speak, but for this paper it spoke comfort.
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