

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Grief should not go on for ever. God want us to get on with living and live our lives to his glory. To stop grieving doesn't mean you forget the person you have been grieving. That doesn't happen; I think of my late husband every day, and will always love him and I know that I will be with him again.

But, like Samuel, when we continue to grieve, we don't want to face the reality of what has happened. We want things to go back to the way they were. We want to go back to the past were our loved one was. But that is never going to happen. Some people grieve for years and when that happens they grieve for themselves and the changes in their lives. They look inward to how bad they feel their life is instead of how great their life is because Jesus died for them, and for us, and was raised from the dead giving us redemption from our sin and eternal life. Their life isn't bad, because God is with them, if only they would accept him and let him be in their lives.. Instead of grieving over what we have, we need to be thankful for what we do have; our friends, our family, our neighbours; and we have look forward to what Gods want us to be and what he wants us to do with our lives.

It is easy to give into grief. After my husband died, nearly 12 years ago, my Assistant Secretary asked me if I would like more time off work after the funeral. I said no, because I recognised in myself that if I stayed at home grieving and feeling sorry for myself, it would be harder for me to eventually return to work. I knew that the more I stayed at home shut away with my pain and misery the more I would want to stay at home. I would not be trusting God to comfort me and give me the strength and courage to move forward to live my life for him. I would not be serving God.

To move on from our grief is to have confidence in God; that he is with us; will comfort us; will give us the strength and courage we need to move forward in our lives; will love us no matter what we do; and, we have confidence in ourselves, and our faith, that we can trust God.

The words of the Psalm comfort us and give us the confidence to trust God.

When people grieve too long, they become afraid of what the presence is and what the future will bring. To fight that fear we need to do what David did; He stayed with God. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

In the Psalm, we can see God's power; a shepherd's rod was over half a metre long and was whittled from the knot of an oak tree. Sharp bits of metal were pounded into it so the shepherd could defend his flock from wolves and other wild beasts. It represents the power of the shepherd over the attackers as God is the protector over his people.

God leads us like the shepherd leads his flock with his staff: The staff is a shepherd's crook and was used to guide the sheep. The staff represents God's guiding and leading. God leads us if we let him, if we accept him, if we listen to him.

We are a lot like the sheep; alone, we are incapable of defending ourselves when Satan plunges us into darkness and plots and schemes to turn us away from the light of Jesus.

Darkness can never put out light, but light, can dispel darkness – light and darkness – good and bad.

God's first creation was light. God said, "Let there be light", and, we have light. (Genesis 1:3-40) Jesus told his disciples, "You are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14-16) Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12).

The blind man was living in darkness. When the disciples saw him, they asked Jesus if the man was blind because of his parents. But Jesus said no it had nothing to do with the actions of the parents or the man. It was nobody's fault. This man was not blind as a punishment and God used his blindness so his compassion and work could be revealed in him for all to see.

In those days, it was a common theory that diseases or disabilities occurred because of the sin of the person. But this man had been blind from birth, so it must have been the parents who sinned. The friends of Job thought the same; because he lost everything, his loved ones and wealth and afflicted with pain and suffering in his body, his friends thought he must have sinned against God.

This theory goes way back to Exodus twenty and Deuteronomy five where God said that children will suffer for the iniquity of their parents to the third and fourth generations. So a person born with a defect was paying for the sin of the parent or grandparent. But, Jesus dispels this theory by saying it was nobody's fault.

Did you notice that the disciples were a bit like the Pharisees, and were treating the blind man as a thing to be discussed as to how, when and why. They did not have the compassion of Jesus, who only wanted to heal the man, not discuss why he suffered his affliction.

When the man was healed, the darkness he lived in was dispelled by the light he saw. "Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." When we accept Jesus as our lord and saviour the darkness is dispelled for us, too.

The Pharisees were living in darkness. They would have heard of Jesus, because he had been travelling around the country healing people and performing miracles. They were ignoring the reports of Jesus and denying what they had seen and knew about him. They were so sure of themselves and their skewed beliefs that they were blind to what Jesus was doing and who he is. They lived in darkness and could not see.

People ask similar questions today: "Why do bad things happen?" God doesn't cause bad things to happen, but he can use the tragic events in our lives to strengthen us, to grow our faith, to increase our trust in God and to bless us and others.

When we show others that, by faith, we are coping with our difficulties, knowing that God gives us the strength and courage to work through our difficult times, we show them what God does for us and can do for them. By showing others how we trust in God, we show them how they can do so too.

The friends and neighbours of the man who received sight could not understand how the once blind man could now see. They were stuck in the past, because they only remembered the

man who was blind, not the reality of what was in the present, just as continuous grieving keeps us stuck in the past and keeps us from enjoying the present and God in our lives.

Physical blindness is hard for some people to cope with, but spiritual blindness is worse. With physical blindness, other senses, smell, touch, and hearing, assist the person to know where they are going and what is happening around them. There are no senses to compensate for spiritual blindness. Only the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can help.

If we are willing to trust God instead of dwelling on the way life used to be and wallowing in our self-pity, God can use our understanding of heartache and sorrows as a witness and blessing to others.

Things can do so terribly wrong in our lives and be so unpredictable. We live our lives going from day-to-day where everything is normal, then 'snap', our lives, our world, is changed, as we have experienced over the last few months.

As we go through these difficult times in our lives, we sometimes forget God and forget the sacrifice that Jesus, who is the light of the world, made for us. We plunge into the depths of darkness, the depths of despair. That is the time when we need to accept the light of the world, Jesus, and put our trust in God.

Through all the dark times, the difficult times we encounter, "He restores my soul, his rod and his staff comfort me."

When you see someone who needs help, there are a few ways you can react. You can ignore the person, as the Pharisees did, treat the person as a problem to be solved, as the disciples, or be like, forget about self and, like Jesus, show the love of God to them.

Which do you want to be like?

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