

Intro: I remember sitting in a little restaurant looking out the window at people coming and going into a 7-11, drycleaners, another small store thinking to myself..."How can do they DO that?" Don't they know the whole world just changed? My sister Linda had just passed about 30 minutes earlier. I had been with her for the past couple of days as she was in hospice, talking with her, praying with her...walking with her through the last days of her life.

I remember thinking...how can they just to on with their life...not knowing...not caring...that my world has just changed. I remember feeling much the same way at the airport in Florida. I had just arrived in Miami after coming home from a mission trip to Cuba, only to find someone from the airline waiting for me with the news that my mother had passed while I was away.

Today I want to talk with you about one of the most difficult parts of life. David called it *"Walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death."* As we talk together about how to Overcome the difficult seasons of life, there is perhaps no more difficult an issue that the one we look at today. Yet, it is one we all deal with. No one is exempt.

Honestly, as we deal with this issue, I come to it with more than a little trepidation. This has been an awful 12-18 months. Certainly, the most difficult in terms of loss than any other time in my 35 years of ministry. Yet, I also come with a great deal of hope, because I feel like God has given me something to share from His word that will help!

Like every other message, this is not a one and done topic. My goal is NOT to "solve", but to chart a path forward.

4 Keys To Help Overcome Loss

1. Lean On What You KNOW, Not What You FEEL.

2 Cor 1:3-11 (7)

And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

This point is not original to me. It is the first point of the message the Pastor Rick Warren preached on the Sunday after a 16 week sabbatical he took from ministry after his son, who suffered with mental illness, took his own life.

Title: *"Getting Through What You Go Through"* His thesis statement: "What you KNOW is what gets you through."

You see, when we come to these most difficult times in life, we have to lean on what we KNOW, Not on FEEL Faith: Not Feelings. Our feelings will betray us every single time. But God never will. Three things we KNOW

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| • God is with us: | Isaiah 43:2 | FEEL like we are alone...we are not |
| • God will never abandon us: | Hebrews 13:5 | FEEL like He left us: He hasn't; right there |
| • God never forgets us: | Isaiah 49:15 | FEEL like He is busy, not listening, distracted: Not true |

When we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, either for ourselves, loved one or a friend, our FEELINGS tell us all kinds of things that are not true! Feelings are REAL, not the TRUTH. The TRUTH is what we KNOW. Hold on to that, never let it go. Refuse to give way to our feelings...because our feelings change...but God never does. FAITHFUL! In those most difficult times of life we stand on HIS truth...not OUR Feelings

2. Give Yourself Have Permission To Grieve.

Eccl 3:1;4

There is a time for everything...a time to grieve and a time to dance

Sometimes we mistakenly believe that because we are Christians, and love Jesus we shouldn't grieve. Not true. God has put us together to grieve. When we lose someone we love...it hurts...and we SHOULD grieve. It isn't healthy to avoid grief. One of the things I regularly share at a funeral service is the therapeutic help grief provides. Need it. But, we need to grieve in the right way. Look at what the bible tells us about grief.

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| • Our grief is different: Hope in the future: | 1Thess 4:13 |
| • Our grief is never alone: God is near brokenhearted | Psm 34:18 |
| • Assurance it will pass: Joy comes in morning | Psm 30:5 Psm 125:5 Sow in tears reap in joy |

One of the keys to Overcoming loss is grieving appropriately. When you don't grieve, you don't heal. NEED IT

3. Let God And Others Comfort You.

Mt 11:28

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

God is the ultimate source of our comfort when we grieve. He is the one who BEST understands and cares. Yet, there are often a number of different ways in which He expresses and gives us comfort. We need to be open to ALL of them

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| • God comforts us with His presence | Jn 14:16 | I will ask Father He will give another comforter |
| • God comforts us with His Word | Psm 119:28 | My soul weary w sorrow, strengthen w word |
| • God comforts us through His people. | 2Cor 1:3-4 | Comforts us so we can comfort others |

Sometimes I will talk with someone that seems to be inconsolable. The loss and grief is overwhelming them. When that happens I ask: Are you in God's word? Are you praying, worshipping, engaging with others. Almost every time I hear, Oh no, if I come to worship, I just sit and cry: THAT'S OK! Come...cry...let others love on you! Get in His word, read it, weep..allow His word to strengthen. Sit in His presence and pour out your heart... ISOLATION IS ENEMY

4. Look Forward To LIFE Not Backward To Death.

1Cor 15:43

"Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness but will be raised in strength."

When death comes this is one of the most significant mistakes we make. We look back. We focus on the grief, and on the pain and on the loss. And that is ok...for a period of time. But, those of us who know Jesus, and have the confidence that death is NOT the end of life, but the transition to the presence of God should look forward. It is ok to grieve, as we have said...but we grieve with hope. We can look forward to what God has given to those we love

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| • Glory of His presence | Rom 8:18 | <i>Suffering of present not compared to glory to come</i> |
| • Joy of eternal life | Rev 21:4 | <i>God wipe away tears, no death, sorrow, crying, pain</i> |
| • Promise of reuniting | 2Sam 12:18-23 | <i>I will go to him, but he will not return to me</i> |

You see, either we truly believe...or we don't. If we believe...if our confidence is in the faithfulness promise of God, then we can look forward to what God has in store for the ones we love...and for us.

CONCL: As we close today there is one more piece that I want to challenge you with. The single best way I know to Overcome Loss is to Live in such a way that you have no regrets. What do I mean by that? I have stood in the hospital rooms, funeral homes, gravesides and living rooms of many, many people over the years as they process loss. There is one refrain that I have heard that has left a lasting impression on me. "I wish..."

- Told them how much I loved them
- Forgiven them....or asked for forgiveness
- Spent more time with, less time at work
- Gone to the place we talked about, done the things we planned to do but put off.
- I wish I had served God instead of everything else in my life: Put him first...and Not last!

When Jesus was leaving this world He said something that I want to challenge you with today.

"I have given you glory on the earth, having done all the work which you gave me to do." John 17:4

The single BEST way I know to Overcome Loss is to Live in such a way that you have no regrets!

What does that mean for you?

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| • Make a phone call before it is too late; | Express forgiveness...Seek forgiveness |
| • Prioritize family...not work... | Time with your spouse, with your children |
| • Invest in serving God and others | |

All week...as I have been thinking about this message one thought came to mind. No Regrets: No Regrets: FIX IT