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EDINBURGH

The Season of Loss

If you go camping in Scotland you're wise to buy a 4-season tent, because you never know when glorious sunshine will turn to sleet and hail!

Whilst we may long for our lives to be predictably enjoyable, the reality is that the seasons of our life change. King Solomon observed this in Ecclesiastes 3:1: *"There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven."* God uses various seasons of our lives to mature us and make us like Jesus (*Romans 8:29*).

God uses seasons to keep us dependent on him. Jesus last words to disciples were not, "You will have it easy, to the very end of the age!" but rather, *"I will be with you until the very end of the age"*.

His presence with us is enough to bring us safely through every season, with a story to tell of his faithfulness to us.

We're wise to prepare ourselves for the Season of Loss, because:

Loss is a fact of life

Life is full of losses. It's sobering that nothing around us is permanent. We will all face tragedy, grief, loss, or disaster. We will lose things that are important to us. Loss varies in scale: you can lose your income, job, health, marriage, dreams that fail to come to pass, and most painful of all, loved ones you care about who die.

Loss is often beyond our control

"Good things happen to bad people. Bad things happen to good people." (Ecclesiastes 8:14)

We cause much of our own misery and stress, but not all. Jesus referenced two tragic news stories of his day in *Luke 13*. His point was that loss is a reality of life and we must be ready for it. Sometimes loss and hurt is outside of your control.

Loss is a human experience surrounded by complex human emotion

Loss brings about deep and confusing emotions that need careful navigation. Commonly people experience anger, denial, bitterness, depression, guilt, fear, anxiety. Each person and each loss is different and experienced differently. In *John 11* a dear friend of Jesus, Lazarus, dies. In that story you see Mary and Martha refusing to accept Lazarus would die, angry at Jesus for not coming sooner, and there is a lot of pressure on Jesus to feel guilty (*"If you'd come my brother would not have died!"*).

When processing loss we can feel guilty we should have phoned more, or cared more or visited more or prayed more. Jesus was no stranger to these emotions. And more than that the passage says *"Jesus wept"*. He shares our painful human emotions around loss and weeps alongside us. He's not indifferent to our pain. When the season of loss comes we need God to carry us as it can be overwhelming for long periods of time.

There are **5 helpful responses** we can make to seasons of loss. (*These are from Rick and Kay Warren, who lost their son a few years ago*):

1. Release your grief

"Pour out your heart to God, for he is our refuge."(Psalm 62:8) Many Psalms stress the importance of pouring out our genuine emotions to God. When someone asks you, "How are you?", you don't have to just say, "Fine thanks!" Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* (Matthew 5:4). It's OK to grieve our losses. If you're a naturally emotionally expressive person, you perhaps have a head start but your challenge is to do it to God, not just others. If you're an internal processor, it helps to choose to talk to others to help you know what you're feeling, so you can pray.

When we release our grief to God he comforts us, he is, *“the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.”* (2 Corinthians 1)

2. Receive from others

“Carry each other’s burdens.” (Galatians 6:2) *“Weep with those who weep.”* (Romans 12:15)

We often isolate ourselves when facing loss, but we need the support of friends and family around us to help us keep seeing beyond the situation.

Prior to a season of loss we must take responsibility for ensuring we have close Christian friends who will be there for us in our season of need. Practically that means:

- Belong to a Small Group where you can form deeper relationships and share life.
- Tell people when you are facing loss. Sound the alarm, don’t expect people to know!

3. Refuse to be bitter

You must choose how to respond to loss in the longer term *Hebrews 12:15* describes a *“root of bitterness”* that must be resisted. We know from experience that some people in the midst of loss exude incredible peace and joy, whilst others grow increasingly resentful and bitter. We can resist bitterness by:

- **Accepting what cannot be changed.** Faith is not pretending you’re OK or denying reality. It’s refusing to be discouraged when things are tough and trusting God through difficult circumstances. **Eric Lidell** said, *“Circumstances may appear to wreck our lives and God’s plans, but God is not helpless among the ruins. He is always master of the situation.”*
- **Look at what’s left rather than what’s lost.** *1 Thessalonians 5:18* says, *“Give thanks in all circumstances.”* Keep reminding yourself of the many blessings that remain in your life. The antidote to depression is gratitude.

4. Remember what’s important

Losses clarify our values. In *Luke 12:15* Jesus reminded us that life is not about how much stuff you’ve got.

1 Timothy 6:7 says we can’t take possessions beyond the grave. Relationships matter

more than possessions, most of all a relationship with God. Jesus said you can gain the whole world yet forfeit your soul. Meanwhile, *Romans 8* says that no matter what you lose there is a greater prize that, “*Nothing in all of creation can separate you from love of God.*”

5. Rely on Christ

The secret of Paul’s strength *Philippians 4:13* was, “*HIM who gives me strength*”. That’s more important than anything. In seasons of loss we can’t even manage to do steps 1 to 4 in our own strength, so we must do this! Rely on Jesus. He’s more than enough for the season of loss.

- **Lean on Him.** He gives genuine strong and stable leadership; He can withstand the weight of your troubles.
 - **Listen to Him.** He gives hope and direction in confusion and chaos; He’s the Good Shepherd.
 - **Look to Him** as your Saviour. No situation is hopeless. Jesus means “*Saviour*”; He will rescue you and He will generously pour out the Holy Spirit (the Comforter) on you.
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Questions:

- **Avoidance vs. Preparation.** Why do we tend to avoid thinking about seasons of loss? How does preparation help?
 - **Pouring out our heart to God.** Do you find it easy or hard to tell God how you’re feeling? How does talking to others help?
 - **Friends you can rely on.** Why is it important to build a community around you before you suffer loss? How do we deepen existing relationships into friendships?
 - **Thankfulness.** Have you ever written out a list of blessings God has given you? How did you feel afterwards?
 - **Caring for those who are facing loss.** How do we lovingly support and care for those we know who are suffering loss?
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