

“THE SEASON OF LOSS”
Ecclesiastes 8:14

Growing in the Seasons of Life Series
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Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

Friends, life is full of losses. It's sobering when you think about the fact that absolutely nothing around you is permanent. You will, each one of you, go through seasons of tragedy, grief, loss; you will have some painful event or circumstance take away something that is very important to you. You can lose your finances, your job, your home, your health, your marriage.

Yet the one thing that is inevitable for each of us is that you will also lose special individuals you care deeply about who die. Oh, you may not be in a season of loss right now and yet your time will come. Therefore this message is meant to help prepare you for this inevitable season of life.

Something very obvious is that life is unfair. Life is not some kind of fairy tale where people live happily ever after. In fact the Bible is very honest about it. Eccl. 8:14 says, *“And this is not all that is meaningless in our world. In this life, good people are often treated as though they were wicked, and wicked people are treated as though they were good. This is so meaningless.”* (NLT)

Have you ever seen this happen? The first thing we need to understand is that you don't always get what you deserve in life. We have this myth tucked in the back of our minds that the bad things that happen to us occur because we are bad, while the good things happen because of our goodness. Neither of them, of course, is true.

Whenever good things happen to you it's called grace; whenever bad things happen to you it's called life. We do not live in a perfect world. This is not heaven. Things don't always go as planned. There is not a happy ending to everything.

The other thing to remember is that not everything that happens is God's will. Not at all! Each week we hear of murders, accidents, mass killings, terminal illness. Now I'm sure that there are some religiously pious people who say, “It all must be God's will.” Yet I believe that is baloney; it is not true.

The Bible tells us, *“God is not the author of evil.”* Don't blame God for all the bad things in the world. He's grieving as much as you are. God could stop mass killers, it would be real easy. All God has to do is take away these killer's freedom to choose and then they won't do it anymore.

Yet to be fair God would then have to also take away your freedom to choose. God, my friends, does have a will and a purpose for you. Yet you and I also have a will, and we often choose to go “my way” instead of his. Whenever that happens, people get hurt.

God does not force his will on us. The Bible says that it is God's will that every person come to repentance and faith in Jesus. His will is that every person develop a personal relationship with him

by faith, be saved and go to heaven. Yet not everyone does. Why? Because God's perfect will is not always done on earth. That's why he asks us to pray, "*Thy will be done on earth...*"

It is not my job, my friends, to explain to you the reasons for all the tragedies of life, all the disasters, all the losses...I can't. Some things we're just not going to understand until we get to heaven. But I can give you the hope of five things the Bible reminds us to do in how you handle losses; five hopes when you lose a job, your finances, a loved one, your health, another loss.

So the Bible tells us when you go through the season of loss that the first thing you need to do is release your grief. This is always the first step on the road to recovery. Tragedy always produces strong emotions—loss, anger, fear, depression, worry, sometimes guilt. These intense feelings are often scary to us and we don't know what to do with them.

Some of you may have never dealt with the grief inside you. You are a stuffer; you push it down; you pretend it isn't there. You live under the myth that God wants me to have a smile on my face all the time; you feel you should never be sad, never grieve, never get hurt.

Jesus, however, taught the exact opposite. In Matthew 5 Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*" It's okay to grieve. If you don't cry at a funeral you might want to ask, "What's wrong here?" Yes, if a person was a believer we know they are in heaven. Yet we don't grieve for their sake, but for ours. We're definitely going to miss them.

What do you do with your feelings? You've got to deal with them; you must release your grief. You can cry out to God, "God I'm hurt! I'm grieving! This is a tough one to take!" If you want a really good example of this read through the Psalms...David often cries out to God.

The second thing you need to do, in this season of grief, is receive from others. Now this is often very difficult for many of us to do. Receiving help from others often goes against our very nature. It may be our human tendency to pull back, to draw into our shell, to say we don't want people around. Yet that's exactly opposite of what you need.

When you're going through a loss you need not only the support of other people, but also their perspective. You need others who can help you see the big picture. I release my grief when I say it's time to let others minister to me. Let them comfort you. Let them grieve with you. Don't be embarrassed, this is one of the reasons God created the church.

Get connected to the church; get to know some people now not just after a crisis hits. Get involved and into a ministry so others know you, so you have some support people in place before the inevitable times of loss come. I say this to you, my friends, out of love. I say it out of care and concern after being with many through these times. Get connected right now; you need others.

The third thing you need to do, in the season of grief, is refuse to be bitter. Job, in the Old Testament had a reason to be bitter. He said, "*Some people have no happiness at all. They live and die with bitter hearts.*" Notice the contrast, my friends, either a person will be bitter or they will be happy. This is because you cannot be both.

In every situation you've got to decide, "Am I going to be bitter or happy?" It's an attitude we have control over. Some people in the face of tragedy say, "We lost it all, but we've still got our lives. We're going to pick up the pieces and start over." While others say, "My life is over. I'll never be happy again. It's the end of the world." Our attitude is a choice.

An important truth is that there is absolutely no connection between your happiness and your circumstances. Some who have had hardly anything go wrong constantly whine, cry and complain. While some others who have gone through some major crisis or problem come out saying, "We can make it. With God's help we'll do it." To be happy we need to say no to bitterness.

The fourth thing you need to do, in the season of grief, is to remember what is important. Losses and tragedies have a way of putting everything in perspective. They clarify your values; you realize what really matters most. You start to focus on those things that are going to last. 1 Timothy 6:7 says, "*We brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it.*"

To have real security you need to build your life on something that cannot be taken from you. Can a job be taken from you? Yes. Can you lose your health? Of course! Can you lose friend or the person you're married to? Unfortunately yes. Can you lose your youthful beauty? Just look around you today. You must build your life on something that cannot be taken from you, and that is your relationship with Jesus.

The fifth thing you need to do, in the season of grief, is to rely on Jesus. This is the secret of strength in the losses of life. Paul says in Philippians 4:13, "*I have learned the secret of being happy at any time in everything that happens. I can do all things through Christ because he gives me the strength.*"

Notice Paul's not saying I can do all things because I listen to motivational tapes; not because I act enthusiastic or try to think positive thoughts. When you've lost a loved one, my friends, positive thoughts are not enough. You need Jesus Christ who gives you real strength.

Here are three suggestions on how to rely on Jesus in the season of loss. One is to lean on him for stability. A major disaster, crisis, or loss always knocks us for a loop. Our bearings get mixed up. Our feet are knocked out from under us. Lean on someone stronger than you—Jesus Christ.

The second thing is to listen to God for direction. The second greatest need in the season of loss is guidance. What do I do next; what now? Remember, God wants to help. He is a good God. He has all the power and has your best interest in heart. Listen to God for direction.

Third, look to Jesus for salvation. Salvation literally means freedom. It means liberty, deliverance, restoration, help, wholeness. God can pick you up out of the miry clay, start you on a new path and deliver you. With Jesus no situation is hopeless.

Jesus Christ, my friends, is not only the hope of the world—he's the only hope for your world. He's the only hope in your situation, your loss, your crisis, your tragedy, your disaster. He is there to help you. If you haven't surrendered your life to Jesus; if you haven't committed your heart, your life, all that you are to him please do so today. Please join me in prayer...