

Death and Life

Dan Nelson - pastor

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Every one of us experiences loss. It's part of the human condition. There are various forms of loss that we encounter on this sojourn. One example is the heartbreak from a broken relationship such as a breakup or divorce. When a child's future is altered due to custody sharing there is almost always loss. When someone is confronted with a diagnosis of illness and their dreams for the future are shattered, the pain can be life altering. When someone close to us dies, the grief can be overwhelming. And it seems that most of us learned to mishandle loss early in life.

Just like you, I have experienced my share of suffering. Although each of our stories are unique, one of the things we surely have in common is the emotional pain and cost of calamity that we all encounter once in a while. This week was another one of those times. I was confronted with the physical death of a close friend. Yet while I look upon "the earthly tent" (1 Corinthians 5) of my dear friend, and ponder the living example of love and acceptance of others, I receive great hope in the promise of Jesus Christ and comfort through his spirit. And the Bible speaks of his mortality covered up in life: death swallowed up in victory.

The reason for my writing about this is to be helpful to you. I am continually amazed at how many people, even Christians, are completely unprepared to handle death. They live their days in complete denial of our mortality and the shortness of life and when an unexpected reminder happens, such as the death of a loved one or their own diagnosis of cancer, their own lack of perspective causes failure to adequately handle the situation. And mishandling the hurt breeds multiplied problems and increase in wreckage. In short, so many of God's people are completely unprepared to deal with life. I submit to you that unless you are aware of how to handle death, you are ill-equipped to live life (since physical death is among the most natural experiences in this life). This is why so many people look to various substances such as drugs or alcohol, or mind-consuming activities, such as workaholic, pornography, inappropriate relationships, and sometimes even virtual reality video games, to enable them to deny reality and to not have to look boldly at real life. Most people are not equipped to handle life, but you and I should be! We are intended to be God's messengers of good news of hope and life in him to others. Those who follow Jesus Christ, of all people on the planet, should be equipped to deal with real life. Jesus said, "If you abide in my Word, you are my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." (John 8)

Let me share with you a couple of things that everyone should know about life and death. Death is the consequence of a fallen world, different from God's original design, and pain is part of that experience. Jesus Christ came that he would restore all things, overcome death, and through him the world might be saved. Jesus experienced real pain, the same as we, that we

might experience his abundance in life. His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven is directly correlated with his overcoming death for all of his people. God is spirit and so are we. Physical death that we experience on Earth is not the ultimate death, but there is a second death. Those who put their lives in Jesus' hands are "saved" from the second death. Christians experience emotional pain but do not need to be overcome by it. God loves us so much. We should be equipped to help others.

As a result, we should be able look into the face of the realities of this life, not as one who is still blind, but as one who now sees. Our losses are tempered with the knowledge of God's truth as revealed through Jesus Christ. We are called to learn, live and walk in that truth. Therefore we do not deny pain nor try to numb our mind from the wisdom of experience, but instead allow the God of all comfort to be spiritual medicine for every wound. We should understand the uniqueness of each individual and therefore allow each person to grieve differently and individually. We should understand that God has put his spirit inside of people and will use them to be his source of healing. Therefore we should avoid isolating from one another. We should expect God to meet every promise, as his children trust in him. We can know that God will use his truth, grace and time to bring renewal and healing to those that call upon him.

This life has many troubles, but we do not need to be ruined. Renew your life in Jesus, bring your pain to him through prayer, read the Scriptures and let him wash you in his word, open your heart to his holy spirit, prepare yourself to help others.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am

Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday

Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View