

The Trail of Tears

~Roy Hartzler

Trials. Tribulations. Temptations. Disappointments. Heartaches. Grief. Valleys. We are all acquainted with these things. We cannot avoid them. They come to all ages and groups of people. If you are a parent, chances are good that you have already experienced a circumstance that includes all the above difficulties. It is what God in His Word, refers to as “an untimely birth.” Many couples know very well the keen disappointment of such an event. The death of an unborn baby is real. It breaks the heart. The grief is overwhelming. The hope of another little one to hold, love, and raise for God is suddenly snatched away. Was it a boy or girl? What color of eyes did he have? What was his personality like?

An experience like this brings you as the father and mother face to face with death. And yet while death is so real and the loss so great, it is a bit difficult to hold a memorial service for a little one you never knew. Perhaps a small handful of people at church will understand your plight and offer the encouragement you need so much. But sadly, many either don't understand or cannot muster enough courage to talk with you about your loss and will go about their lives as usual.

The months following such a loss are difficult. You, as father, in an effort to ease the pain, may throw yourself headlong into your work or other projects and forget that your wife cannot throw herself headlong into her work. Her work is dead and buried. Her hopes, her dreams, and her great mother instincts died with her precious baby. Husband, you may show little outer emotion and very seldom discuss the loss. In the meantime, your wife may be grieving all alone for months and is wondering if you even think of the dear baby.

Where is hope? Where is healing? Where is the peace of God? Why did God decide to take our baby? Why does God give our friends babies and take ours from us?

If you are a grieving couple on this long, lonely trail of tears, here is the good news. There is hope! There is healing! There is peace and it is God's perfect peace! And, yes, please remember that God is absolutely, unchangingly, indisputably sovereign and loving!

“For the Lord will not cast off forever: but though He cause grief yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (Lam. 3:31-33).

Sometimes as we analyze these types of losses, we begin to try to figure out all the why's and wherefore's of how God operates. And while it is impossible for our poor mortal minds to understand the workings of a sovereign God, yet God has graciously provided truths from His Word to help us understand some important facts as He leads us through *“the valley of the shadow of death.”*

1. We live under the curse of sin. A major part of that curse is death. When God, with sovereign right, chooses that our tiny unborn baby is to die, we can humbly accept that without bitterness. You see, death is simply a reality of this cursed, earthly life.

2. As Christian parents, our highest interest is to see our children arrive safely in heaven. My wife and I have five children. Three are eternally safe with their heavenly Father and two remain with us. Although we are only young parents, we have already experienced the joy of knowing that most of our children are in heaven. If you are grieving for your tiny one, remember that your baby is sheltered from sin... he will never be a rebellious teen, he never will have the potential to be a prodigal son, he is eternally safe! could you wish him to return to this cursed world?

3. As you allow God to do His will in your life, the long trail of tears will cause you to be more humble, more kind, more compassionate to others who experience loss. Your life will be purified with the hot fires of trial. early infant loss is not just about grief, terrible heartrending loss, longings and tears. It's also about spiritual growth, drawing close to God and knowing He is drawing close to you. It's about opening your heart, though bleeding and sore, to your spouse and your friends and allowing them to comfort. It's about allowing the God of all comfort to pour in His healing balm that is unmatched even by the best of earthly comfort. It's about exposing the heart to God's Word to see where growth is necessary. Dear grieving couple, the death of your little one is not meaningless grief, rather it holds blessings that are glorious and eternal.

4. As a couple, walking this trail of tears together hand in hand will greatly enhance your marriage. Husband, you have vowed to "love and cherish her in sickness and in health, in prosperity and adversity." Here's your opportunity to show your wife that you love her more than any thing or any one else. Talk about your loss together. Tell each other how you feel about your baby in heaven; how the loss affects your walk with God. Husband, don't think it strange when your wife cries months after the baby is gone. Songs of heaven at a song service, a new mother to be at church, and a new baby at church are all painful reminders that her arms are empty. Rather than wonder why she doesn't "just get over it and get on with life", realize the great mother instincts that God has given her and that it is impossible to have these instincts jerked about without tremendous emotional difficulty. Please remember her joy when you realized God was giving you another baby and the intensely loving bond that formed for the little one she carried. She invested weeks of sickness and fatigue and that very gladly for the great anticipation of another baby, only to dig a grave and walk away. Away to an empty crib, a house void of baby cries. Away to drawers full of baby clothes, that she tucks sadly, tearfully and longingly away. Away to church to see happy mothers and smiling babies. Away to God forbid! a husband who seems not to shed a tear. Is it any wonder she cries? Husband, reach out to your sorrowing wife in comfort and wife, respond with openness. Is there anything that forms a stronger marital bond than to walk together through the valley of the shadow of death and come out on the other side with a peace that only God can give? Allow God to enhance your marriage on this trail of tears.

Have you ever wondered what heavenly activities your baby participates in? Perhaps as the precious little one sits on His Heavenly Father's lap and talks with Him he says, *"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count*

them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.” (Ps 139:13- 18).

Perhaps you are a couple who have not experienced this type of loss but have friends or family who are grieving over a baby gone to heaven. How can you comfort? A typical reaction in relating to friends in grief is to allow the fear of doing something wrong to keep you from doing anything at all. Or to share a brief comfort immediately following the loss, consider it a job well done and assume months later that your grieving friends are healing rapidly and beautifully. Both of these fall way short of true compassion and do nothing to give long term support.

Consider the following:

1. Don't be afraid to comfort. Normally, grieving people are grateful for someone to notice their difficulty and will gladly discuss it. However, don't make the mistake of assuming a grief stricken individual will open a conversation to you. The truth is, they will likely speak to no one of their struggles until they are confident you care about them. You can prove this by simply talking to them about their loss.

2. Be sensitive to times of special difficulty and respond accordingly. Any mother who has lost a child prematurely knows the pain and disappointment of reaching the due date with empty arms. New babies born to other couples drive the pain of the loss keenly home. Phone calls, cards and e-mails are always appreciated during this special time of struggle.

“Blessed be God...the God of all comfort who comforteth us in all our tribulations that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

— Tennille, GA
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