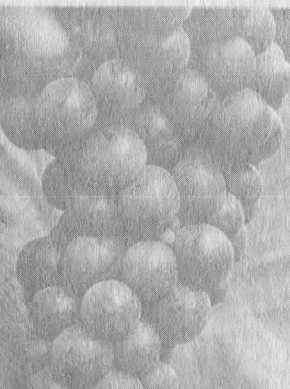


LESSON EIGHT

THE LOSS OF A FRIEND

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”

JOHN 11:25-26 NKJV



REFLECTION

Losses are never an enjoyable part of life, and losing a friend is particularly sad. God's presence in our lives should cast a slightly different light on losses—especially those caused by death, for even death does not limit God's power. If we can trust him to bring good out of even matters of life and death, can we not learn to trust him with smaller losses? Think of a time in your life when a bad experience turned out for good. How did that affect you?

SITUATION

As Jesus traveled in the region of Perea, located east of the Jordan River, he received word that his friend Lazarus had fallen ill. Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were close to Jesus, and he had often stayed in their home. Yet on this occasion, Jesus deliberately delayed in returning back to their home in Bethany. It had already taken time for the messenger to track down Jesus, and now he waited an extra two days. The travel from Perea to Bethany also took time. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days.

OBSERVATION

Read John 11:17–44 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹⁷ So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away.

¹⁹ And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

²⁰ Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. ²¹ Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes

in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

²⁸ And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." ²⁹ As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. ³¹ Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there."

³² Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³ Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. ³⁴ And He said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

³⁷ And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴² And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." ⁴³ Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" ⁴⁴ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and

his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

EXPLORATION

1. How did Mary and Martha react to Jesus' late arrival?

2. How did Mary and Martha differ in the way they expressed their feelings?

3. Do you think Jesus' words to Martha were reassuring to her? Why or why not?

4. How did Martha communicate her belief in Jesus?

5. How did the people react when they saw Jesus weeping over the death of Lazarus?

6. Why do you think Jesus chose to perform this miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead rather than just healing his illness?

INSPIRATION

Martha's words were full of despair. "If you had been here . . ." She stares into the Master's face with confused eyes. She'd been strong long enough; now it hurt too badly. Lazarus was dead. Her brother was gone. And the one man who could have made a difference didn't. He hadn't even made it for the burial. Something about death makes us accuse God of betrayal. "If God were here there would be no death!" we claim . . .

Jesus wasn't angry at Martha. Perhaps it was his patience that caused her to change her tone from frustration to earnestness. "Even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus then made one of those claims that place him either on the throne or in the asylum: "Your brother will rise again."

Martha misunderstood. (Who wouldn't have?) "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

That wasn't what Jesus meant. Don't miss the context of the next words. Imagine the setting: Jesus has intruded on the enemy's turf; he's standing in Satan's territory, Death Canyon. His stomach turns as he smells the sulfuric stench of the ex-angel, and he winces as he hears the oppressed wails of those trapped in the prison. Satan has been here. He has violated one of God's creations.

With his foot planted on the serpent's head, Jesus speaks loudly enough that his words echo off the canyon walls. "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25-26). It is the hinge point in history. A chink has been found in death's armor. The keys to the halls of hell have been claimed . . .

With eyes locked on hers, Jesus asks the greatest question found in Scripture, a question meant as much for you and me as for Martha: "Do you believe this?"

Wham! There it is. The bottom line. The dimension that separates Jesus from a thousand gurus and prophets who have come down the pike. The question that drives any responsible listener to absolute obedience or to total rejection of the Christian faith.

"Do you believe this?"

Let the question sink into your heart for a minute. Do you believe that a young, penniless itinerant is larger than your death? Do you truly believe that death is nothing more than an entrance ramp to a new highway? . . .

This is a canyon question. A question which makes sense only during an all-night vigil or in the stillness of smoke-filled waiting rooms. A question that makes sense when all of our props, crutches, and costumes are taken away. For then we must face ourselves as we really are: rudderless humans tail-spinning toward disaster. And we are forced to see Jesus for what he claims to be: our only hope. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. How did Martha's response demonstrate both faith and a lack of faith in Jesus?

8. How was Jesus "intruding on the enemy's turf" in this story?

9. How do Jesus' words and actions in this passage comfort you?

10. How do Jesus' words and actions in this passage challenge you to have greater faith in him?

11. How has God helped you during a recent time of loss or disappointment?

12. How can you share the pain of others in your life who suffer?

LIFE LESSONS

Grief often spawns blame. Tiny fingerlings of fault suggest themselves to us. Someone we love dies. Perhaps we feel it was our fault. Maybe we feel it was someone else's fault. And if no appropriate guilty party accepts the blame, then there's always God. We sometimes are so busy assigning blame that we miss the point of death's inevitability and the genuine hope of resurrection. Jesus used the death of one friend and the sorrow of two others to demonstrate for all time that real life is more than this plane of existence, as sweet and wonderful as this one can be. It was not meant to be the whole meal but a foretaste of things eternal.

DEVOTION

Father, thank you for caring about our pain and disappointments. Calm the whirling winds of fear and hurt that threaten our faith. Keep us from trying to cope with our struggles by our own strength and willpower. Help us to release our emotions to you and trust you to sustain us. Thank you for your comforting words of wisdom. Let us receive the healing of the Holy Spirit.

JOURNALING

How will you surrender your past hurts and disappointments to God?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of John during this twelve-part study, read John 11:1–12:50. For more Bible passages dealing with hurts, read Matthew 9:36; 11:28–30; Romans 12:15; and 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.