

lesson nine

MAY 25–31

Times of **Loss**

“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8, NKJV).



There are different types of loss, whether it be of life, a loved one, or trust. Dying flowers represent loss, possibly because a flower's beauty is followed by its death. It is something that is inevitable, just like losses in our lives.

Job 1; 2;
Ps. 27:13, 14

Introduction

The Good and the Bad, God's Love Prevails

Although we are not promised a life free of trials and tribulations, we are called to claim the Word of God. We are promised a God who will walk beside us during our time of need. These trials and tribulations often come to test our faith and trust in God, but we sometimes lose it when our health is challenged or when life gets rocky. During this time, we may experience deep pains that become unbearable when we try to deal with them ourselves or question the authority of God as Job and his friends did.

We have all lost loved ones, employment, material possessions, or relationships.

The story of Job reveals to us the power and divinity of Christ while illustrating the manipulative antics of the devil. Satan wielded the weather, invoked illness (Job 1:16–19; 2:7), and even influenced Job's friends just to get him to curse God. Just as he did with Job, the devil spends days, nights, and even years trying to get us to curse God during our times of pain and anguish. Can you see the relation of Job's situation in your life?

What of David, a man after God's own heart? Throughout the book of Psalms, David acknowledges his trials, enemies, grief, and struggles. Yet he still concludes the psalms by declaring God's faithfulness, acknowledging his life to be a living testimony of God's love for humanity.

We have all lost loved ones, employment, material possessions, or relationships. But I encourage you to have an enlightened and positive mind-set to choose to see the hand of God in everything that takes place in your life. We are capable of losing anything and everything. But we serve a mighty God who is capable of restoring us in His glory whenever we fall short and feel helpless.

This week, we will study how God's love transcends the pain experienced through the people and events we lose in our lives. He has a plan that manifests itself when we give Him our deepest level of worship—when we thank God during our trials and trust Him when we are tempted to lose hope.

Hope for Life's Losses

Life Is Filled With Losses

Since the Fall, our families have been plagued with all kinds of losses: our romantic relationships end, our family members expire, our friends move away, we are terminated from our jobs, and our medical diagnoses shatter our sense of strength and vitality. While we may experience losses collectively, the effects are uniquely personal. We all grieve our losses. Grieving is the natural response to loss. The way grief affects us depends on many things, including what kind of loss we have suffered, our upbringing, our beliefs or religion, our age, our relationships, and our physical and mental health. Admittedly, dealing with a loss is one of the most difficult things and times in a person's life. The physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual effects can be overwhelming and can lead to feelings of helplessness, fear, and isolation. During this season of grief, Satan will seek every opportunity to try to bring us or our families into permanent bondage.

The best comforters are those who have experienced comforting themselves.

However, while grief has to be expressed, contrary to popular opinion, no timetable or clear process exists for working one's way through grief. Grief is as complicated as sin itself. There are many factors that also influence the way we grieve: cultural norms and religious practices sometimes dictate and impact how we grieve. Whatever the dynamics, grieving is extremely important because it allows us to be released from the bond we have had to the lost person, object, or experience and reenter a new normalcy. Naturally, we will grieve because God has created us with a kind of instinct for self-preservation. However, healthy grieving gives direction to our grief. Speaking on the subject of losing a loved one, Paul declares, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13, NIV). In an excellent manner, the apostle Paul addresses grieving and hoping simultaneously. Indeed, Christian believers can face any kind of loss with hope. Hope is immersed in the promise of our Lord Jesus that those who mourn shall be comforted (Matt. 5:4).

We believe that God, in His great love for His creation, has revealed answers to some of the greatest questions we will ever face. This understanding can help us better cope with all life's losses. We can find great comfort in the knowledge described in the following sections.

We Cannot Prevent Losses in Our Lives, But We Need Not Face Our Losses Alone

Note carefully that Paul did not advocate that we should not grieve our losses. It's normal and healthy to grieve when we experience loss. However, isn't it comforting to know that we don't need to wallow alone in our sorrow? "The Lord has special grace for the mourner, and its power is to melt hearts, to win souls. His love opens a channel into the wounded and bruised soul, and becomes a healing balsam to those who sorrow."¹ Those who truly believe and understand the Bible can with confidence claim its promises (e.g., Ps. 147:3; 2 Cor. 1:3, 4). We can give our hurt to Him because He cares for us and we are never alone.

The Pain of Our Losses Is Severe, but the Purpose Is Sweet

The behavioral, physical, and psychological impact of each loss can be so intense that it feels like the weight crushes us and squeezes the very life out of us. Not only do we need hope—we need help. Paul assures us that we will be helped. He writes, "That we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:4, NKJV). In her book *Blessings*, Mary Craig writes: "The value of suffering does not lie in the pain of it . . . but in what the sufferer makes of it. . . . It is in sorrow that we discover the things which really matter; in sorrow that we discover ourselves."² And in a real sense, our sorrow ushers us into a new community, a community of comforters. The best comforters are those who have experienced comforting themselves.

Suffering and Sorrow Will One Day Come to an End

One of the most difficult things to accept during the initial stage of grief is that the physical and emotional pain will ever go away. And it does not matter how many losses we have experienced, we will be faced each time with these feelings and emotions. The reality is that we will never in this life be able to fully deal with losses because we were never created to. Pain, suffering, losses, and even death are all intruders; they were possible but not necessary. These were never a part of God's plan. However, let not our hearts be troubled. The Bible foretells a future in which God " "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4, NIV).

REACT

1. Which loss would you categorize as the most painful to endure?
2. How has a personal loss revealed that the promises of God are sincere?
3. How have you been able to find purpose in your loss?
4. One day our sorrow will be turned to joy. Can you envision what that looks like?

1. Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p 13.

2. Mary Craig, *Blessings* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), pp. 133–144.

Testimony

Rx for When Loss Brings Sorrow

Ps. 147:3

“Are you filled with sorrow today? Fasten your eyes on the Sun of righteousness. Do not try to adjust all the difficulties, but turn your face to the light, to the throne of God. What will you see there? The rainbow of the covenant, the living promise of God. Beneath it is the mercy seat, and whosoever avails himself of the provisions of mercy that have been made and appropriates the merits of the life and death of Christ has in the rainbow of the covenant a blessed assurance of acceptance with the Father as long as the throne of God endures.

“. . . Put your hand in the hand of Christ. There are difficulties to be overcome, but angels that excel in strength will cooperate with the people of God.”¹

“There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel.”

“Let the soul be drawn out and upward, that God may grant us a breath of the heavenly atmosphere. We may keep so near to God that in every unexpected trial our thoughts will turn to Him as naturally as the flower turns to the sun. Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. . . . Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. . . . The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.”²

REACT

1. Based on the counsel above, what are the key components that facilitate resilience during adversity and times of loss?
2. Since all families have problems, how do ordinary families cope with their life challenges of loss? Share your experiences.
3. How can your church nurture those who are facing significant loss? Share your ideas with your pastor.

1. Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 462.

2. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 99, 100.

Phil. 3:8

Evidence

The Supreme Supersedes

Paul delivered a seismic blow to a fundamental Jewish perception during a sermon in Philippi. For generations they had believed that men who complied with physical circumcision were thus entitled to a proverbial halo. Forsaking God's plain instruction to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts and then allow God unhindered access, they rejected spiritual circumcision. Paul elucidated "the circumcision" to comprise those who worship God in Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and depend completely upon Him (Phil. 3:3). Unabashedly, he revealed his pre-conversion litany of boasts:

"Circumcised on the eighth day"—according to God in Genesis 17:12.

"Of the stock of Israel"—a direct descendant of the patriarch (Rom. 11:1).

"Of the tribe of Benjamin"—the tribe of Israel's first king, Saul (1 Sam. 9:1, 2).

"A Hebrew of Hebrews"—a perfect pedigree (Deut. 14:2).

"A Pharisee"—an exemplary keeper of Mosaic law and traditions (Acts 23:6).

Christ is supreme, and every other person and thing must be a distant second.

Though he had believed he was ready for translation, the Damascus road epiphany wrought spiritual circumcision, and Paul no longer valued those things (Phil. 3:8). The Greek word for loss, *zēmian*,¹ was also used in Acts 27:21 to refer to the loss endured sailing from Crete. After being refreshed by friends, whatever possessions Paul had, he regarded "as loss in comparison with the knowledge of Christ, even as seamen do the goods on which they set a high value, in comparison with their lives. Valuable as they may be, they are willing to throw them all overboard in order to save themselves."²

After his conversion, Paul went back to preach in Tarsus (Gal. 1:21). His strict Pharisee family would have endured shame beholding the former poster child of Pharisaism interact with the uncircumcised. So Paul's calling to the Gentiles likely precipitated the loss of most of his family ties.

Even a revered existence becomes *skubalon*,³ the Greek for "rubbish." In this, its sole New Testament occurrence, "no language could express a deeper sense of utter worthlessness of all that external advantages can confer in the matter of salvation."⁴ Christ is supreme, and every other person and thing must be a distant second.

1. The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon. Strong's number 2209.

2. Albert Barnes, "Philippians 3:8," *Notes on the Bible*, 1834, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/barnes/index.htm>.

3. The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon. Strong's number 4657.

4. William R. Nicoll, "The Good the Enemy of the Best," *Expositor's Dictionary of Texts*.

How-to *Finding Life After a Loss*

Ps. 30:5;
Prov. 4:7;
John 10:10

When God created the first family, it was His plan that the members would experience a union that was filled with love and happiness. The idea that hurt and even loss would become part of that union was not a concept that He willed for them or any family thereafter. God's Word says that He wishes that we would experience abundant life! Sadly, sin has disrupted that plan. We have seen the toll that sin has thrust on the family unit. Families have experienced a loss of trust, faith, communication, and even the literal loss of loved ones. How can we learn how to labor through these losses and strive to live in the abundance of joy that God intended? Here are a couple of recommendations for finding life after a loss:

Look for understanding (Prov. 4:7). When we think of losing something, often our next thought is understanding where we can find it. We begin to rack our brains for where we were the last time we had it. It's the same when we lose certain parts of a relationship we share with another. We try to recall when the last time we trusted them was and how they can restore that trust.

God's Word is an open book of instruction to guide us to wholeness.

When we lose something that is of value to us, we start to retrace our steps, trying desperately to recover what's been lost. We look under cushions, in pants' pockets; sometimes we'll even take a lengthy drive to search the parking lot where we stood hours earlier. It is similar when recovering a valuable relationship. We must seek where we were when we lost that essential characteristic. God wants to restore our family relationships, and if we earnestly seek His help in learning how to find what was lost, He is willing to help us.

Search the Word. God promises that He will never put more on us than we can bear. It is without a doubt that when we experience loss in our families, no matter in what capacity, He will provide a way for us to experience wholeness again. In the Bible, we can read stories of families that experienced loss and greater examples of their victory through Christ over losses. The stories of Lazarus, Joseph and his brothers, and Moses and his family teach us how, through faith, love, and forgiveness, God restores families during a time when they need it the most. God's Word is an open book of instruction to guide us to wholeness.

REACT

What other examples can you think of in the Bible of families who have overcome some type of loss?

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Luke 16:13;
Rom. 6:16

Opinion *Loss of Freedom*

At Creation, humankind was given the ability to reason, analyze, and make choices about who or what to obey, thus, making ourselves slaves to God or to man (Luke 16:13). Even the smallest areas in which we choose to be obedient make us slaves either positively or negatively. This is the manner in which the brain develops a habit.

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Neuroscientists have determined that habit-making behaviors and decisions occur in two different parts of the brain. When behaviors become automatic, the decision-making part of the brain essentially goes to sleep, thereby creating a habit. Through a series of micro-decisions, we build habits and create “bonds” with one side or the other, eventually repeating these decisions so often that the brain operates on autopilot, essentially, choosing freedom or bondage. Jesus admonishes in Luke 16:13 that no one can serve two masters. When we build habits, we are choosing whom we will serve. This service may not seem obvious to others; however, God looks at our hearts, and we are either bound to Him with cords of love or in league with the evil one, giving up our liberty with each bad choice.

This loss of freedom may manifest in different ways. Poor relational decisions may lead to a loss of trust; poor food habits may lead to a loss of health; and poor stewardship decisions may lead to a loss of resources (natural, financial, and/or human). While initially these losses may not feel as though they are of any consequence, they do result in a loss of our freedom. This loss of freedom creates a chasm between us and God and is in direct opposition to His will. In the same way, when Eve touched, consumed, and shared the fruit, a familial division was created that could be restored only through the ultimate sacrifice in the family. Through separation and loss, the feeling of guilt—recognizing one’s own shortcomings—is a gift from our loving Father by His Spirit (Ps. 32:1–5). It is through this gift that we are able to honestly repent and rely on His redemptive power to restore us to righteousness. God’s Holy Spirit is like a lens through which we can see where we have fallen short of God’s glory, the first step toward restoration.

REACT

Just as sin is part of this world, so is a loss of spiritual and literal freedom. What can we do to identify when the smallest decisions are creating a separation between us and God?

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Exploration *Coping*

| Luke 23:46

CONCLUDE

We all experience loss in different ways, and we all need to find ways to cope with our losses. While the loss of a loved one, especially under tragic circumstances, might be among the most difficult to deal with, we cannot minimize the effect other losses have as well. A child whose parents separate by divorce experiences a loss, as does someone who loses their means of sustenance through retrenchment. Losing your home through forced relocation and loss of freedom through incarceration or disability because of an accident or illness can also be very devastating. And because in this life we are bound to experience some losses, we must be prepared and equipped to deal with it in a way that will bring healing. Jesus will lift your burdens. So while a loss may make you feel as if God has abandoned you, that is the time to pray without ceasing, staying always in touch and in tune with your heavenly Father and knowing that He will always have your back, now and into eternity.

CONSIDER

- Finding ways to release the pain, such as crying. Crying does not equate to weakness—even Jesus wept.
- Reaching out to a trusted family member, a friend, your pastor, or a counselor to talk about your pain.
- Going to a therapist when you are uncomfortable sharing with anyone else.
- Praying for others who may be experiencing a loss similar to yours.
- Reaching out to someone who needs your help.
- Keeping a prayer in your heart as Jesus did while He suffered on the cross when He spoke to His Father (Luke 23:46).

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, chap. 14, "Shall Not God Avenge His Own?"

Larry Yeagley, *Life After Loss* (Review and Herald®, 1999); *Heartache and Healing* (TEACH Services, 2012).