

Week 1: The Emptiest Day

Psalm 34:18 – “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”

Empty doesn't really describe it. You didn't see this coming. Or maybe you did, but not now, not like this. One day, they were here right next to you. Now? You can't believe it but they're gone. And your life is altered forever.

People often say it can take years to feel “normal” again. The truth is, there is no “normal.” There is now only your new

“normal” and today it doesn’t feel like a friend at all.

Empty, numb, shocked, confused, all these descriptions can’t even begin to describe the disorienting feelings of anger, despair and betrayal a person experiences. Even more confusingly there can be feelings of relief mixed in??? These are confusing and aren’t trustworthy thoughts and they are downright infuriating when they try to intrude the mind. It’s ok. Your mind is trying to process a devastating loss, a grief too big for its own cognitive ability.

Men have many different approaches to processing grief. My advice? You do

you. Take time for yourself to work through it at your own pace. Put zero pressure on yourself when it comes to time and your inner emotional compass. There's no recipe, no standard process, no amount of distraction, no workaholism, no quick fix. You may have times where you grieve quietly and times when you feel like screaming, punching things, breaking things, and do. It's ok. There may be times of intense anger and overwhelming feelings of doubt and disbelief that fill these first months. It may feel more comfortable to carry the pain in silence for a time because it feels like strength. Do what works for you. Only know that

talking or writing about your feelings is always better.

Loss isn't weakness. Speaking or writing down how you feel isn't weakness either. Loss is the wound that comes from true love. You're wounded. Ignoring it too long won't help.

Running away from it won't alleviate anything. Expressing it won't fix it right away either. Make friends with time and communication. Make pressure (on yourself) your enemy especially in the first months after the event.

Quick explanation: When we speak or write our feelings the exercise we are engaging in is taking the abstract thoughts in our minds and making them

concrete. When our brain goes through the process of talking or naming the feelings it brings clarity. Don't drown in the abstract unmeasurable muck of your mind. Force your brain to make those abstract, distant, confusing emotions into real literal words. If you'll name them it will be easier to understand and process them.

Life in this world has a way of unbalance. While it's hard to believe, especially right now, life is not chaos. Eastern mystics (Hindu's, Buddhists, Taoists, etc.) believe there's a balance deep within a person or within the created universe. Sadly there is none anymore. Sin entered this world in Genesis and all balance was lost. Loss

exasperates this truth of unbalance within and without and makes it even more visible that it doesn't exist apart from faith. These Eastern mystics even the ones who live and teach among us here in the West, apply inadvertent pressure on a person to discover a balance that doesn't exist within them or in the universe around them. Balance is a cruciform reality (cross like) and it exists only from the one place where heaven meets earth, the person of Jesus on His cross. Earthly life lived from the self will never be balanced. Earthly live indulging in the world is unbalanced too. Life in the sinful world is lived and exerted only in extremes without faith in Jesus and His cross. Do your best to

avoid the extremes! Cling to what Jesus won for your loved one who's passed - Eternal life!

In each grieving person exists a strong desire for quick or rash change. It's the mind's way of trying to get out of the pain of loss by doing, thinking, and saying things we normally wouldn't think, do or say. Don't resist the sadness. Sometimes you just have to sit in the sadness for awhile. Do resist the extreme changes your flesh will pull you towards. Smoking too much, drinking too much, using drugs, and other extreme immoral choices will only add more pain on top of your suffering in grief.

Engaging in these will make perfect sense in the moment. They will seem like a relief, a way out. But they will suck you in to their control and make you feel dependent on them. That's their goal. There is already enough pain to deal with in this loss. It won't help to add more guilt, shame or addiction to these already confused emotions by giving into the extremes.

God is calling you even in this pain to be who you truly are, a person dependent on Him and Him alone. That's the truth, even if it doesn't make sense right now and even if we don't want to hear it.

Grief is not just extreme sadness. It's also dangerous disorientation. Your compass is spinning. Clear direction in life feels like a dream. You're not only missing someone, you're missing who you were when they were still here.

Grief will also begin a pattern of oscillating within our hearts and minds. We oscillate back and forth many times a day between facing our own emotions and rebuilding new routines without the person we love.

Again, it's perfectly understandable and a common experience for all these feelings to hit us. You wonder: Who am I now? What am I supposed to do with this horrible pain I now have to carry

around? God doesn't shame you for those questions. He meets you right here in the pain and oscillation of this.

Jesus didn't live the good life. He didn't enjoy being here. Isaiah the prophet said "He was a man acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). I often encouraged people by saying - if Jesus was a suffering servant, like the Bible says, that means we are just as close to Him in our suffering as we are in our moments of joy. Think about His closeness to you right now. He knows this pain and agony very, very well. He understands the emptiest day.

The Bible says God is near to the brokenhearted. It doesn't say God is

near only once you've figured this out and fixed yourself. He's right beside you, not just once you've stopped crying. But right now, in the mess, in the sorrow, in the ache. Besides, fixing yourself is impossible. Remember no pressure is the best. You can't fix this. You're not that powerful. God can and He will. Lean on His powerful truth found in His Word.

What if, instead of hiding your grief in a delusion of self reliance, you could simply bring it to the One who already knows this pain best? This is prayer! If you've been thinking about reading your Bible and searching for answers there, I encourage you! Start in the book

of 1 John near the end of your Bible.
It's a great place to start reading!

Jesus isn't afraid of your emotions, or your anger with this situation. If you're mad at Him feel free to tell Him, if you're confused tell Him that too. He weeps with you in this. He is our friend, not our enemy.

This creation of His getting messed up this badly wasn't His plan at all. God is our way out of this mess. He is not the one to blame for it. Salvation is precisely our escape from pain like this. That's what Jesus brings, a real way out of this mess. In His time it will happen.

Prayer: Lord, I don't have any words right now that express myself or that make sense to speak. It is my emptiest day!! But You see and know full well my pain. Be near to me in this darkness. I don't understand it at all, but I know you do. Amen.

Reflection: What do you need to tell God about your loss today? Think of 3 words that describe how you feel right now. Write them in the blank. Now say them out loud to God. "Lord Jesus I feel...."

Day 1 _____, _____,
