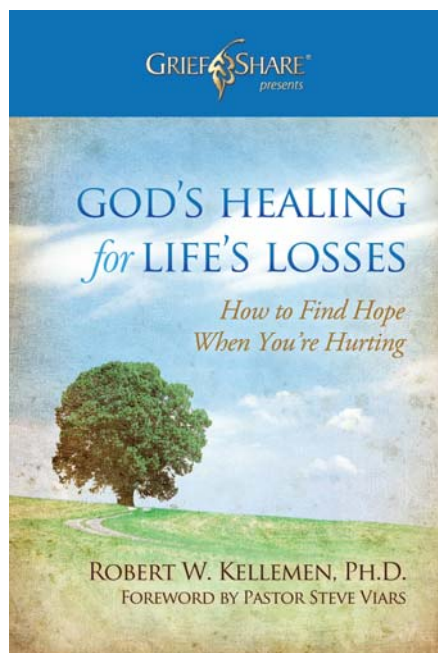


*God's Healing for Life's Losses:
How to Find Hope When You're Hurting*



Copyright © 2010, Bob Kellemen

Released by BMH Books, May 2010

Introduction

There Is Hope

Jesus promises that life will be filled with losses.

I know. That's not exactly the promise you were hoping for. At least it's honest.

In John 16:33, Jesus guarantees that we will suffer. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you *will* have *trouble*."

Life's Losses

One word says it all: *trouble*. "You're gonna' get squashed!" is a fair paraphrase. Hemmed in, harassed, and distressed. Oppressed, vexed, and afflicted.

Trouble communicates both external and internal suffering. External suffering: illness, poverty, criticism, abandonment, and death. Internal suffering: fear, anxiety, anguish, depression, and grief.

The Bible repeatedly recites Jesus' not-so-wanted guarantee. Consider just a few samplers:

- Genesis 45:1-11; Genesis 50:20
- Deuteronomy 8:1-10
- Psalm 13; Psalm 42; Psalm 73; Psalm 77; Psalm 88
- Job: The whole book!
- Jeremiah and Lamentations
- John 9:1-3
- Romans 5:3-5; Romans 8:17-39
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 2 Corinthians 4:1-18
- 2 Timothy 3:12
- Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 10-12
- James 1:2-18
- 1 Peter 1:3-9; 1 Peter 2:11-25.

From passages like these, we learn that *we are not alone*. In this life, we *all* suffer. Life is filled with losses.

My Promise to You: Remaining Real and Raw

I suspect that I'm preaching to the choir. You're reading this book because the raw reality of life's losses haunts you everywhere everyday.

I also imagine that you've grown weary of Christian books that pretend. They're far too Pollyanna for you. You're tired of Christian counselors and well-meaning spiritual friends who dispense far too much "happiness all the time, wonderful peace of mind."

Frank Lake vividly describes what happens when we fail to face suffering honestly and refuse to engage sufferers passionately.

The pastoral counselor, in spite of himself, finds himself tittering out his usual jocular reassuring prescriptions, minimizing the problem, and thumping in optimism or the need for further effort. He has the ingrained professional habit of filling every unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of good advice.ⁱ

There has to be a better way, don't you think?

Here's my promise to you. I'm not giving you pabulum. No trite platitudes. No false promises. No pretending.

We'll remain real and raw like the Puritans who labeled suffering "losses and crosses." We'll go deep into the abyss of affliction like J. I. Packer who understands the gravity of grinding affliction.

There is an umbrella-word that we use to cover the countless variety of situations that have this character, namely *suffering*. Suffering . . . may conveniently be defined as *getting what you do not want while wanting what you do not get*. This definition covers all forms of loss, hurt, pain, grief, and weakness—all experiences of rejection, injustice, disappointment, discouragement, frustration, and being the butt of others' hatred, ridicule, cruelty, callousness, anger, and ill-treatment—plus all exposure to foul, sickening, and nightmarish things that make you want to scream, run, or even die. . . . *Ease is for heaven, not earth*. Life on earth is fundamentally out of shape and out of order by reason of sin. . . . So strains, pains, disappointments, traumas, and frustrations of all sorts await us in the future, just as they have overtaken us already in the past.ⁱⁱ

How do we face such losses and crosses? How do we handle life's strains and pains? Our purpose is to answer such candid and confusing questions honestly and biblically.

God's Healing: Creative Suffering

Of course, if all we do is talk about life's losses, then that too fails to tell the whole story. We need to be able to deal with life's losses *in the context of* God's healing.

Jesus did. "I have told you these things, so that *in me* you may have *peace*. In this world you will have trouble. But *take heart!* I have *overcome the world*" (John 16:33).

Peace. With one word Jesus quiets the quest of our soul. We thirst for peace—shalom, wholeness, stillness, rest, healing.

Take heart. Hope. Come alive again.

We live in a fallen world and it often falls on us.

That's what you long for. I know it is, because it's what I want.

We live in a fallen world and it often falls on us. When it does, when the weight of the world crushes us, squeezes the life out of us, we need hope. New life. A resuscitated heart. A resurrected life.

Brilliantly the Apostle Paul deals simultaneously with grieving *and* hoping. Do not "grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Paul, who offers people the Scriptures and his own soul (1 Thessalonians 2:8), skillfully ministers to sufferers.

To blend losses and healing, grieving and hoping, requires *creative suffering*. Frank Lake powerfully depicts the process.

There is no human experience which cannot be put on the anvil of a lively relationship with God and man, and battered into a meaningful shape.ⁱⁱⁱ

Notice what the anvil is—a lively relationship with God and God's people. Notice the process—battering. Notice the result—meaning, purpose. What cannot be removed, God makes creatively bearable.

Another individual, this one intimately acquainted with grief, also pictures creative suffering. British hostage, Terry Waite, spent 1,460 days in solitary confinement in his prison cell in Beirut. Reflecting on his savage mistreatment and his constant struggle to maintain his faith, he reveals:

I have been determined in captivity, and still am determined, to convert this experience into something that will be useful and good for other people. I think that's the way to approach suffering. It seems to me that Christianity doesn't in any way lessen suffering. What it does is enable you to take it, to face it, to work through it and eventually convert it.^{iv}

Creative suffering doesn't simply accept suffering; through the *Cross it creatively converts* it. Our passion is to learn together how to grieve but not as those who have no hope.

How to Find Hope When You're Hurting

So, how do you find hope when you're hurting? It's certainly not through any "quick fix." Nor are there any "secrets" or any "easy steps."

Let's be honest. Growth through grieving is an arduous journey. Much like the journey of Much-Afraid, the lead character in Hannah Hurnard's dramatic allegory *Hinds' Feet on High Places*.

Tired of valley living, but terrified to trek the high places alone, Much-Afraid asks Shepherd for companions on her journey. Encouraged by his pledge that fellow travelers would soon join her, she starts alone, anticipating the arrival of her partners. When they appear, she's horrified. Shepherd introduces them.

They are good teachers; indeed, I have few better. As for their names, I will tell you them in your own language, and later you will learn what they are called in their own tongue. "This," said he, motioning toward the first of the silent figures, "is named Sorrow. And the other is her twin sister, Suffering."^v

Poor Much-Afraid! Her cheeks blanched and she trembled from head to toe.

"I can't go with them," she gasped. "I can't! I can't! I can't! O my Lord Shepherd, why do you do this to me? How can I travel in their company? It is more than I can bear . . . Couldn't you have given me Joy and Peace to go with me, to strengthen and encourage me and help me on the difficult way? I never thought you would do this to me!" And she burst into tears.^{vi}

A strange look passed over Shepherd's face.

"Joy and Peace. Are those the companions you would choose for yourself? You remember your promise, to accept the helpers that I would give, because you believed that I would choose the very best possible guides for you. Will you still trust me, Much-Afraid?"^{vii}

Don't misunderstand. Fear of suffering is normal. Grief is necessary. Shepherd is not denying these authentic life responses.

So just what is Shepherd saying?

Trust me.

Trust is vital because suffering is inevitable. How do we find hope when we're hurting? Through trust.

Where do we find God's healing for life's losses? In Christ. With Christ.

It's a Personal Journey . . . With a Personal God

Moving through hurt to hope is a journey—a personal journey. Finding God's healing for life's losses is a trek—a messy trail with far more detours than we would ever wish.

That's why I'm not promising you eight easy steps. However, as we journey together, I will offer you eight biblical markers on your personal healing journey. As you begin exploring these trail markers for life's trials, you'll experience the ups and the downs, the hills and the valleys, the zigs and the zags.

View these markers as your personal suffering *GPS: God's Positioning System* derived from God's Word. Nothing ever written can compare with the honesty and reality of the Word of God. It is totally sufficient to light our path. It is utterly profound in its capacity to resonate with our experiences.

*God's GPS empowers us not to evade suffering,
but to face suffering face-to-face with God.*

The various “stages” we'll explore in the grief journey provide compass points in God's process for hurting and hoping. They empower us not to evade suffering, but to *face suffering face-to-face with God*.

When tragedy occurs, we enter a crisis of faith. We either move toward God or away from God. We'll probe how to move in the direction of *finding God* in the midst of our suffering.

The end in sight is not quick answers through easy steps. Our goal is deep healing through a personal journey . . . with God, in Christ. He never lets you walk alone.

Our Journey Together

Through *God's Healing for Life's Losses*, I invite you to walk with God and God's people. At the end of chapters two through nine, you'll find two built-in “*Grief and Growth Workbooks*.” You'll be able to trace your journey, and you'll be able to journal about your healing process.

While you can read and apply *God's Healing for Life's Losses* alone, I've also designed it for group use. Consider gathering with some other spiritual friends to share your progress along your journey. At the very least, invite one other friend to be “Jesus with skin on” for you.

Grief tends to tempt us to walk alone. Fight against that temptation. Walk with God and His people as you journey on the healing path.

ⁱLake, *Clinical Theology*, 58.

ⁱⁱPacker, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 249, 254, emphasis added.

ⁱⁱⁱLake, 97.

^{iv}Waite, *Taken on Trust*, 37.

^vHurnard, *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, 65-66.

^{vi}*Ibid.*, p. 66.

^{vii}*Ibid.*