

Lazarus

There are two stories that we should reflect upon about grief and grief recovery as we come to an end of our time together. The first is about Lazarus who rose from the dead. Jesus arrived several days after the burial in the town where he and his sister Mary and Martha lived. Jesus went out the burial place instructed the grave to be opened and then called out to Lazarus. Now think for a moment about what Lazarus thought and did when he first heard the Lord's voice calling him. First, he heard the Lord's voice, calling to him to "Come out". Lazarus was laying on a stone shelf in a very dark small space, wrapped in burial cloths. His body had been anointed with oils and wrapped in the traditional preservation method. And then-- he was awake and aware his name is being spoken. He must have been very confused. How did he get here? What was happening? He must have also thought.. "I guess I need to get up, but how? This is going to take a great deal of effort to respond to Jesus's voice and His command to come out. -- where ever your "out" is!"

He had to decide to actually make the effort to come to the entrance of his burial cave. For me -- My response would have been --"Hey, I am all bound up in here. Actually not feeling like leaving the cool dark place right now. If you want me out there, --- well, let me think about it while."

But Lazarus responded. He must have rolled over on his side and felt the edge of the shelf. He must have eased his bound legs off of the shelf onto the ground. He would have shifted his weight so that he could move closer to the edge of the shelf to stand without falling. Then after standing up in the limited space, he took baby step after baby step to make his way to the entrance. I am not sure if I had been Lazarus I would have been willing to make all that effort. When he made his appearance at the entrance, Jesus told the others to go unbound him and release help him to be free of the burial garments so he could reenter the world where family and friends were waiting.

What an act of courage it was for Lazarus. What determination Lazarus had to make the effort. What rejoicing from the friends and family as they saw that he was once again alive. This miracle is so like our journey in grief.

We are in a dark place, bound by garments of sadness, confusion and loneliness. When hearing the Lord's call to rejoin life, we should expend the energy to first sit up, ease into a standing position and then take tiny steps to reach the entrance to the new chapter of life. The best part is that there will be people there – some new faces even who will help us shed the garments that have bound us so tightly in the grips of grief, and to walk with us out into the daylight of life. Can you see the pattern that we can follow?

John the Baptist

The other story is about the death of John the Baptist. Jesus had been preaching all day. The people had listened intently for hours as he shared the story of love and God's desire to have true fellowship with them. Word came that John the Baptist was dead. It was sudden. It was violent. There was intimacy because John was Jesus's cousin and friend. John was the one who heralded The Christ. We know those 3 elements maximize the impact of loss on the griever. Upon hearing the news Jesus got into to a boat and rowed out into the Sea of Galilee. He took time to be alone, to reflect, cry, and talk to his heavenly father, no doubt, about what he had just heard. The grief was significant. The impact was deep. The future of his ministry had changed. His life was moved onto a different path. His human expectation that John would continue to be a part of his ministry was shattered. The plans for the future of his ministry were torn apart.

Although Jesus's grief was much swifter than ours, He again modeled the same response. After His period of grieving, He put the oars into the water and rowed back to the shore. The story could have been reported differently. The people that had been there all day could have scattered. They could have easily said –“OK, Let's go home. The preacher has just gotten really bad news. We are tired. We have been here all day. It is time to leave.” But the scripture is very clear, the people were still there waiting for his return. We, like Jesus and Lazarus, will find a group of people waiting for us, when we make the effort to return to shore. We just have do the work of grieving and move toward our goal of contentment. A goal

which places us on the shore or at the door of our dark cave of grief, ready to reenter life.

So what does that new life look like? This is a do it yourself project. There is no “cut and paste” option. Be creative and be open to new experiences and friends in your life. Seek and pray for God’s leading.