

QUIET TIMES
for
THOSE WHO GRIEVE

H. NORMAN WRIGHT



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Quietness

It's quiet. All you hear are the sounds of silence. At times, the quiet brings a sense of relief, even a respite from whatever has occupied your mind for the past days or even weeks. For many, quietness is a welcomed visitor. For others, it means facing the pain they so furiously try to avoid. Activity has been used as Novocain to deaden the pain that has moved in as an uninvited companion. Quietness speaks to us in many voices. It can have the voice of blame, which questions what we either didn't or did do...and wished we hadn't. Then, we feel our spirit being battered by the accusing voices.

Quietness also has a voice that brings to mind a vivid picture of the person who is no longer a part of our life. This thought overwhelms our heart and the cascade of tears begins. Perhaps that's why many fill their days with so many activities and people—because it deadens the ache.

What do most want from times of quiet? They want to hear the voice of comfort. Anyone who is hurting, struggling with sorrow, trying to cope with the aftermath of a loss, and grieving is looking for comfort. Is this you?

Comfort—a simple seven-letter word. It’s a word with numerous meanings. It can mean strengthening aid, consolation in time of trouble or worry, a feeling of relief or encouragement, or easing the grief or trouble of it. Is this your situation? Is it relief that you need right now? Is there some way in which you need to be encouraged? What is the grief in your life that you would like to see lifted at this time? Right now, your desire is probably for the companionship of comfort. Perhaps you’re one of those who wonders if there is any comfort to be had.

You’re not alone. When the devastation of life fell on Job with the loss of his children and most of what he owned, he said, “I go about mourning without comfort.” The psalmist cried out to God, “When will you comfort me?”

Comfort will come and perhaps when and where you least expect it. Hold on to this knowledge—it may take your head to convince your heart that it is so. Your grief will *not* last forever. It may seem that way, but eventually it will subside.

God’s Word will be one of your sources of comfort as will a touch, a word, or a prayer from others. The psalmist said, “This is my comfort and consolation in my affliction: that Your word has revived me and given me life” (Psalm 119:50 AMP).

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds—curing their pains and their sorrows (Psalm 147:3 AMP).

Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into

gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow (Jeremiah 31:13).

You will grieve but your grief will turn to joy (John 16:20).

Remember these words and pray them several times today,

God, I need, I want, and I desire your comfort. Encourage me and bring others into my life to walk alongside me to hold me up. Thank you for hearing my prayer and responding. In Jesus' name, amen.

Who Is the Keeper of Your Life?

Comfort. Sometimes it's elusive, especially when it seems the upsets and losses won't stop. They just keep coming, and there's no time to address the latest one before a new one enters your life. "Where is the relief?" you wonder. Remember, comfort means "to be encouraged." Encouragement can come from many sources—a friend calls, a card arrives in the mail, someone gives a gentle hug. It can also come from another source—God's Word. Listen to these words and promises from Psalm 121:

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will

watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

What did you see as you read this psalm that offers you comfort? God watches over you constantly. He doesn't sleep. He's always there. Even if you wonder where he is now, he's watching over you. He's protecting you during the day and the night. What are your nights like at this time? For many, they're the worst. You lay down and try to sleep. The more you try, the worse it gets. And your mind goes into high gear. The more you go over your scenario, the wider awake you are. Then you look at the clock and realize an hour has passed as your mind wandered. You keep saying, "I've got to sleep," but it doesn't work. The night fears and insomnia are constant companions.

Remember God's promise! He *will* protect you by night. When you're awake, follow the advice in this verse and you could be amazed by the results: "If I'm sleepless at midnight, I spend the hours in grateful reflection" (Psalm 63:6 MSG). Verses 7 and 8 can bring you comfort for the present and the future: "Because you've always stood up for me, I'm free to run and play. I hold on to you for dear life, and you hold me steady as a post."

There are four things to remember:

1. God preserves you from evil. Remind yourself of this several times today. Even if the worst happens, you won't face it alone. Life is not out of control, even if we don't understand what's happening at the moment.
2. God preserves your life, here and forever. If we have a

personal relationship with Jesus Christ, our life never ends. You have the gift of eternal life.

3. God preserves you every day, not just certain days of the week. Sometimes we wonder where he was on that particular day. Have you ever said, “God is with me today at all times and in all places”? He is not limited by time and space. He knows your thoughts, feelings, and intentions. When you walk into that store or drive that car, you’re not alone. Take comfort in that fact.
4. God preserves you eternally. God cares for you constantly— not on a hit-or-miss basis. There are no pauses or breaks in his caring.

If there is one thing to remember today, it is this: God is the keeper of your life—always.¹ He’s watching over you, just as Eugene Peterson describes:

The Christian life is not a quiet escape to a garden where we can walk and talk uninterruptedly with our Lord, nor a fantasy trip to a heavenly city where we can compare blue ribbons and gold medals with others who have made it to the winners’ circle.... The Christian life is going to God. In going to God, Christians travel the same ground that everyone else walks on, breathe the same air, drink the same water, shop the same stores, read the same newspapers, are citizens under the same governments, pay the same prices for groceries and gasoline, fear the

same dangers, are subject to the same pressures, get the same distresses, are buried in the same ground.

The difference is that each step we walk, each breath we breathe, we know we are preserved by God, we know we are accompanied by God, we know we are ruled by God, and therefore, no matter what doubts we endure or what accidents we experience, the Lord will preserve us from evil, he will keep our life.²

Shock's Purpose

You're shocked. The news you received wasn't good. In fact, it's hard to believe. You may even think someone made a mistake. It isn't true! It couldn't be! It's just not registering. The author of *Grieving the Loss of Someone You Love* described it well in a chapter called "God's Anesthesia":

When we experience a great shock, as we do when we lose someone we love, that shock alters our perceptions for a time. Colors seem drab, bird songs seem out of tune—if we hear them at all. Even our favorite foods seem tasteless. The entire world seems out of focus.

Often we feel numb, and any movement is an effort. We may even forget the most common elements of our lives. We may suddenly look around us at a stop sign and realize we have no idea where we are, only to discover when we really concentrate that we are mere blocks from our home. We may stand staring at someone in utter confusion, unable

to remember the telephone number we have called our own for years.

Such occurrences are common among the bereaved. They can be disconcerting but, if we are careful, they are seldom dangerous. Certainly, if you find yourself terribly distracted and unable to concentrate, it would be an excellent idea to arrange for others to drive you places until you are tracking better. You will want to ask for input from people you trust when making decisions that cannot be postponed. Otherwise, you can simply “sit tight” and wait for this particular phase of your grief to pass. Be assured, it will.

There may be a few people who will interpret your shock as indifference. You may even be confused by it yourself. One woman, Margie, had a difficult time forgiving herself for being “heartless” because the afternoon of the day her mother died she took her daughter shopping for a formal to wear to the prom. Looking back, Margie could not understand why she thought clothes shopping was such an important chore that it could not be postponed. She was ashamed of herself because she had not been consumed by sorrow immediately upon hearing the news of her mother’s death.

If you’ve had a similar experience, there’s no need to feel ashamed. The fact that you functioned so well immediately following the death of your loved one

does not, in any way, indicate that you are unloving or unfeeling. It is simply a reflection of the wondrous way God has provided for us to function in times of great sorrow. It may be a short while before you feel the full impact of your loss. Be grateful for that. There will be time enough to feel your pain.

The time of shock is a good time to reaffirm your faith. There may be times in the near future when you will have occasion to doubt God and his goodness. You can blunt the force of those doubts if you use this period of shock to confirm and reestablish your faith in God and the truth of his Word. Sinking your spiritual roots into the bedrock of God's Word now will allow you to remain rooted and grounded in the midst of the storm.¹

Truth to Hold Onto

The losses that produce grief, be they the ordinary losses of life or the harsh experiences of trauma, are indeed the hardest things we will ever face. Let us remember, then, some of the truths that will help us get through the journey of grief.

Grief is a journey with a conclusion.

God has designed us with the internal ability to adjust to life's most jarring losses. That adjustment will not take place in a matter of days or even weeks if the loss was severe. Months and years are more realistic. This is not to say if a loved one dies you will not be able to cope for a very long time; rather, you will be affected and will continue to adjust your inner and outer life for a long time. We instinctively look for ways to cope from the outset, and, with God's grace, we will find ways to make it through long days and sometimes longer nights.

But with the passage of time, the journey will be completed. Sometimes we take baby steps, at other times we make longer strides. The completion of the journey does not mean that our memories are erased. Even when we approach the end of the

journey, it does not mean that in future years we will not have a stab of pain when we remember the time of separation when the loss occurred. But, we will have learned how to change our lives to a new, adapted mode of living.

You don't need to go on the journey alone.

Your loss is your loss, and in that sense, you are alone. No one can truly come alongside you and say they know exactly what you are going through (although we should not be surprised when other people try to say that). However, there are people who have come through the same *kind* of thing that you have. If you lost a child, or a spouse, or a parent, or a job, or a marriage, there are others who have gone through the same journey. Most important, there are people who have made it through to the other side. Seek them out. Tell them your story. Don't expect that any one person will have all the wisdom, insight, and compassion you are craving in your loss—but do take whatever support you can from the assurances of others who have been enabled to go on with life even after being knocked to the ground.

No one can take from you the living memories, the reality of the good things you experienced with whomever you lost.

We would experience less pain if we never had anything or anyone to lose, but that would only be to our own poverty. If you are coming through the experience of grief, it is probably because there was something or someone good in your life whose absence you now are starkly aware of. That you were able to appreciate what you had is to your credit, and you carry with you into the future the same capabilities to love and to value.

If you were made a better or fuller person because of a close relationship, then you have been permanently changed for the better, and that ennobles the life of the person who is now gone.

God has offered himself to you in your grief.

God has promised that he would not leave us alone, that the lives of creatures like us who experience pain and suffering will ultimately be restored and healed if we hold onto him, and that it is possible to be reunited with those whose final destination is an eternal relationship with him. When Jesus left his disciples, he could see the pain in their eyes. He told them that they would grieve for a while, but their grief would turn to joy.

In the life of Jesus, we see God himself experiencing all of the basic kinds of loss we go through. He was betrayed by friends and rejected by those he came to help. He wept at the tomb of a friend and shook with fearful anxiety on the night before his own arrest and death. He saw people trashing their lives and making a mockery of everything that really matters to God.

But he also saw more. He saw the brilliance of the resurrection after the darkness of the tomb. He saw us, capable of standing before God clothed in righteousness. He knows us to be smoldering wicks and bent reeds. But instead of snuffing us out or breaking us, he gives us grace to go on.

When we face tragic loss, we may not feel very strong in our faith. But we must remember that faith, at its core, is the weak and troubled person throwing himself or herself on the mercy of God. And if we do so, we will find ourselves borne up.¹

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:28-31).