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Childhood Lost:
When the Joys of Childhood
Have Passed You By

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Long-term illness

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Tragic events

growing up in an alcoholic

Loss of a loved one

Unplanned pregnancies

Divorce

Childhood Lost

Abuse/neglect

Living with mistakes

Lack of material provision

parentification

Death of a dream

What is the impact?

- Robbed of innocence and being naive
- Children are meaning makers and interpreters
- Effects of missing out on parenting
- Discipleship and mentoring
- Never learning how to play
- Growing up too fast
- Looking for love in other places
- Missed joys and opportunities
- Forced to live with choices you are unable to navigate or understand

The impact (continued)

- Guilt – “I am responsible...If only...”
- Shame – “I am a failure. Others blame me and look down on me.”
- Anger – “I have been wronged. I must have vindication and justice.”
- Confusion – “Who is there to help the child make sense out of the experience?”

We heap loads of interpretations that
harm us, rather than help

Functional paradoxes:

- I am responsible for everything. I am responsible for nothing.
- God is to blame. I can't blame him.
- I need you. I can't trust you.
- I am overwhelmed. I feel nothing
- Result: Constant self-doubt, feeling crazy, and circular struggle to figure life out.
- The question of "Why me?"

False expectations in suffering

- I won't. A Christian won't face suffering. God will protect me from bad things ever happening. After all, doesn't he promise his protection to us?
- God will explain it to me. I'll see the reasons for it and it will make sense to me.
- It will be easy for me. I'll have a natural confidence and strength to deal with it.
- I'll see the light at the end of the tunnel and it will all be worth it to me.
- There will be a material reward waiting for me at the end of it. I'll see the fruit of my labor in this lifetime.

God has a purpose

- He is in it and sovereign
- He is not silent
- He is at work
- He gives us freedom to grieve and say “This isn’t meant to be”
- He is our comfort, he offers his presence to us
- He gives us community, resources, and others to help
- His purposes are not always made known to us

What can I expect from God?

- Expect God to care about your suffering. He cares deeply. He understands thoroughly.
- Expect God to care more about your holiness than your happiness.
- Expect his comfort, not always relief.
 - * He is a “gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.” (Jonah 4:2)
- Expect him to do more than you could think or imagine. Do not settle for less.
- Expect him to work in ways you will not understand.
- Expect him to also want to “richly provide us with everything for our enjoyment.” (1 Timothy 6:17)

To the sufferer

How does God expect US to respond?

- Question your expectations
- Remember who you are
- Trust his character, not the circumstances (Lam 3)
- Put your suffering to words—“Naming the silences”
- Seek counsel outside of yourself
- Live in community

God has a purpose

- *Jesus understands our suffering.*
 - ❖ His suffering is deeper than ours. (Gen 15, Isa 53, Rev 5)
 - ❖ His suffering transforms our suffering. (1 Peter)
- *Jesus comes near to the sufferer. We are his and he is ours.*
 - ❖ He covers our shame; he is our covering.
 - ❖ He remembers what was done to us. (Hab 1 & 2)
 - ❖ He will never leave us. (Hebrews 13)
 - ❖ He calls us to trust him. (Hab 1 & 2, Isa 16:4)

An unrealistic model?

“I have heard some people complain that if Jesus was God as well as man, then his sufferings and death lose all the value in their eyes, ‘because it must have been so easy for him.’ Others may (very rightly) rebuke the ingratitude and ungraciousness of this objection; what staggers me is the misunderstanding it betrays. In one sense, of course, those who make it are right. They have even understated their own case.

The perfect submission, the perfect suffering, the perfect death were not only easier to Jesus because he was God, but were possible only because he was God...

An unrealistic model? (continued)

But surely that is a very odd reason for not accepting them? The teacher is able to form letters for the child because the teacher is grown-up and knows how to write. That, of course, makes it easier for the teacher; and only because it is easier for him can he help the child. If it rejected him because 'it's easy for grown-ups' and waited to learn from another child who could not write itself (and so had no 'unfair' advantage), it would not get on very quickly? The advantage—call it 'unfair' if you'd like—is the only reason why he can be of any use to me. To what will you look for help if you will not look to that which is stronger than yourself?"

How do we help the sufferer?

- Patience and the 'ministry of listening' — Bonhoeffer
- Walk alongside for the short-term and the long-term.
- What type of hope does not disappoint? Don't give false hope.
- Hope is always future focused. When we look to the future, is it paved with hope? Expectation? Fear? Trust? Dread?
- We are created with eternity in our hearts, yet we are temporal beings. We exist in the present, yet we are called to live for the future. How should that intersect with my present life?

How do we help the sufferer?

- Don't minimize the suffering.
- What do we teach in the church? What do we teach through our families? What do I teach my children? Is there a magic formula for avoiding suffering?
- Do we inadvertently, but wrongly, teach where our hope lies?

Don't separate hope from suffering

- You cannot make accurate sense of suffering apart from hope.
- It gives us a vision for eternity. Properly defined hope points us in the right direction. It keeps us from despair.
- It reminds us that there is something better than this life.
- We don't live for the external. We are concerned with the internal, but our ultimate vision is for the eternal.
- Suffering produces good for the life of the believer.

Expectations in suffering loss

“When we hope, we impose certain expectations on the future.”

How do I define hope when I am suffering?

What is it we hope in?

- Whether or not these expectations come to pass often determines whether God has failed us or not.
- Not only do we allow our circumstances to shape our view of God, but the expectations we bring to those circumstances.
- “We may express our hopes simply, but with each ‘simple’ hope comes a host of unspoken expectations.” *Believing in Hope – J. Lehmann*

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

“The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—to Christ. But it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call ‘ourselves,’ to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be ‘good.’ We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way—centered on money or pleasure or ambition— and hoping, in spite of this, to behave honestly and chastely and humbly.



C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do. A thistle cannot produce figs...cutting grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and re-sown.”



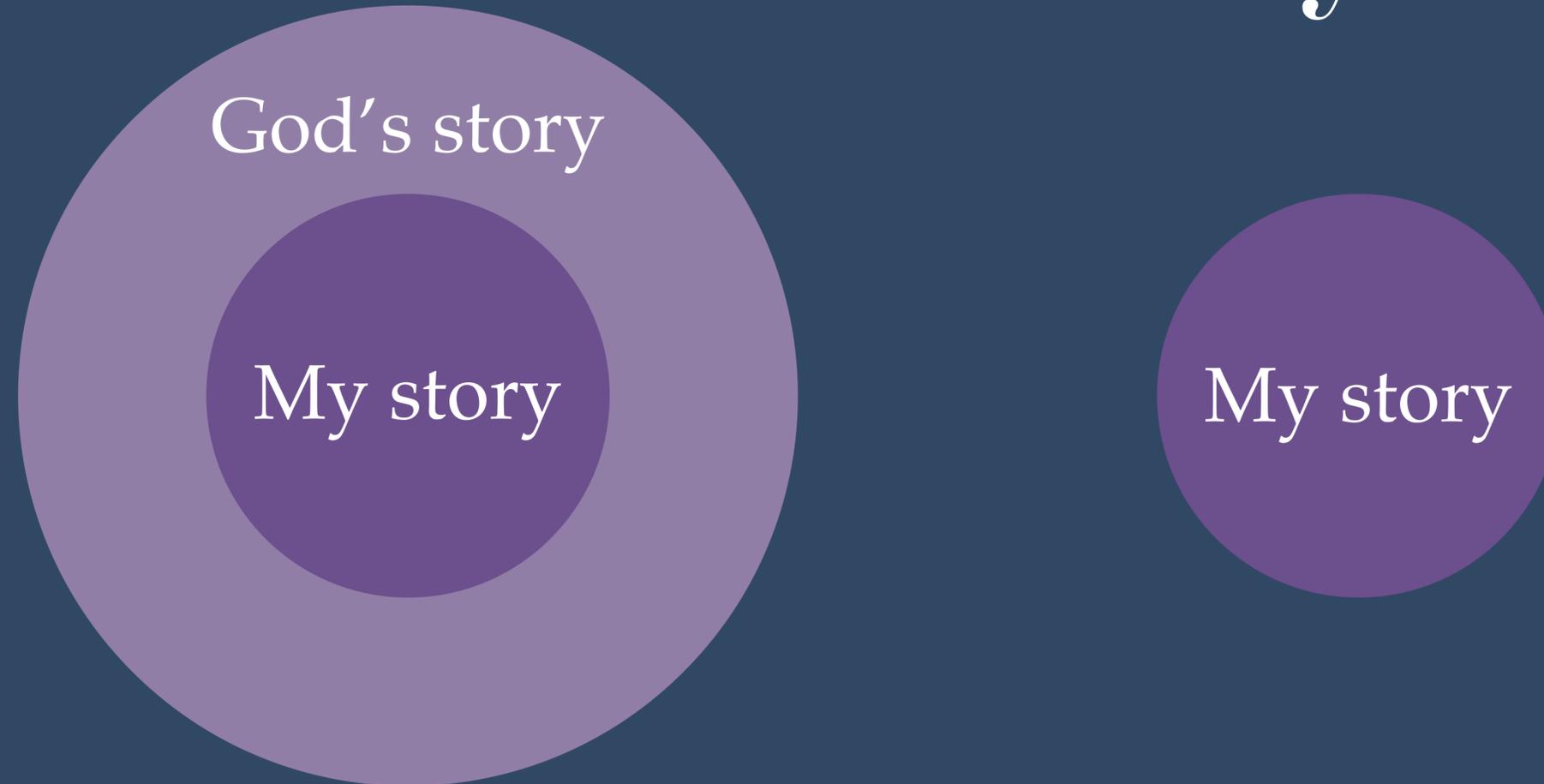
Practical ideas

- What are things I missed that I could pursue now?
- What might I say or do that I could not at the time? (journal, write a letter, memorialize, experience)
- Are there things I can make right or respond to now?
- What must I hand over to God and entrust he will redeem, vindicate, restore in his own time?

Practical ideas

- Are there young people I can invest in and walk alongside, experiencing the joys & fruit of their walk?
- Join a team, sport, hobby, etc.
- Be a volunteer for an organization you would have enjoyed experiencing as a child.

Your life is a story...



When we find our stories embedded in the midst of God's story, our life naturally begins to bear his image. This will manifest itself in every area of life, even my suffering.

What does processing loss look like?

We needed to find the ability to grieve and find comfort in the Lord.

To shed tears and still trust.

To be confused but know our hope was sure.

To hold onto both sadness and belief.

This, I believe, is the complexity of living with loss.

Sorrow couched in hope—and knowing what it is we hope for.

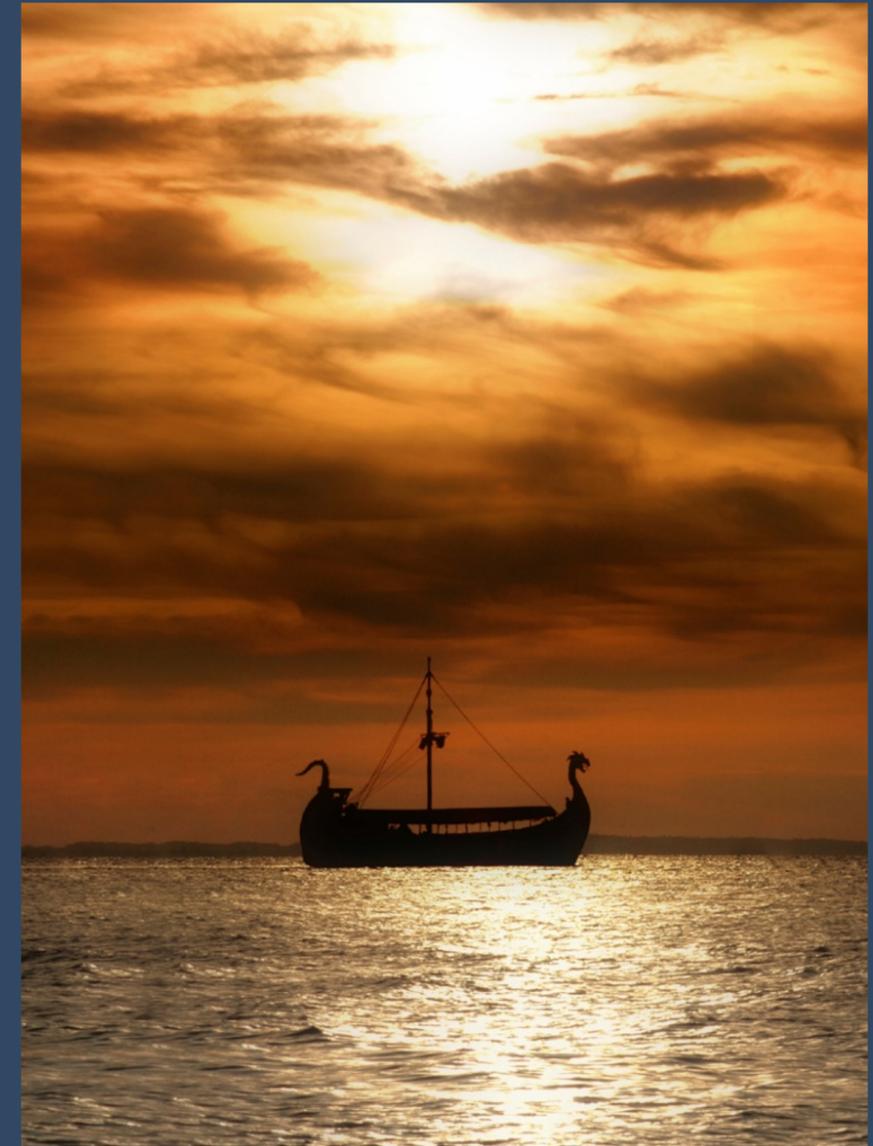
It Is Well with My Soul

1. When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

*It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

2. Though Satan should buffet,
Though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

3. My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

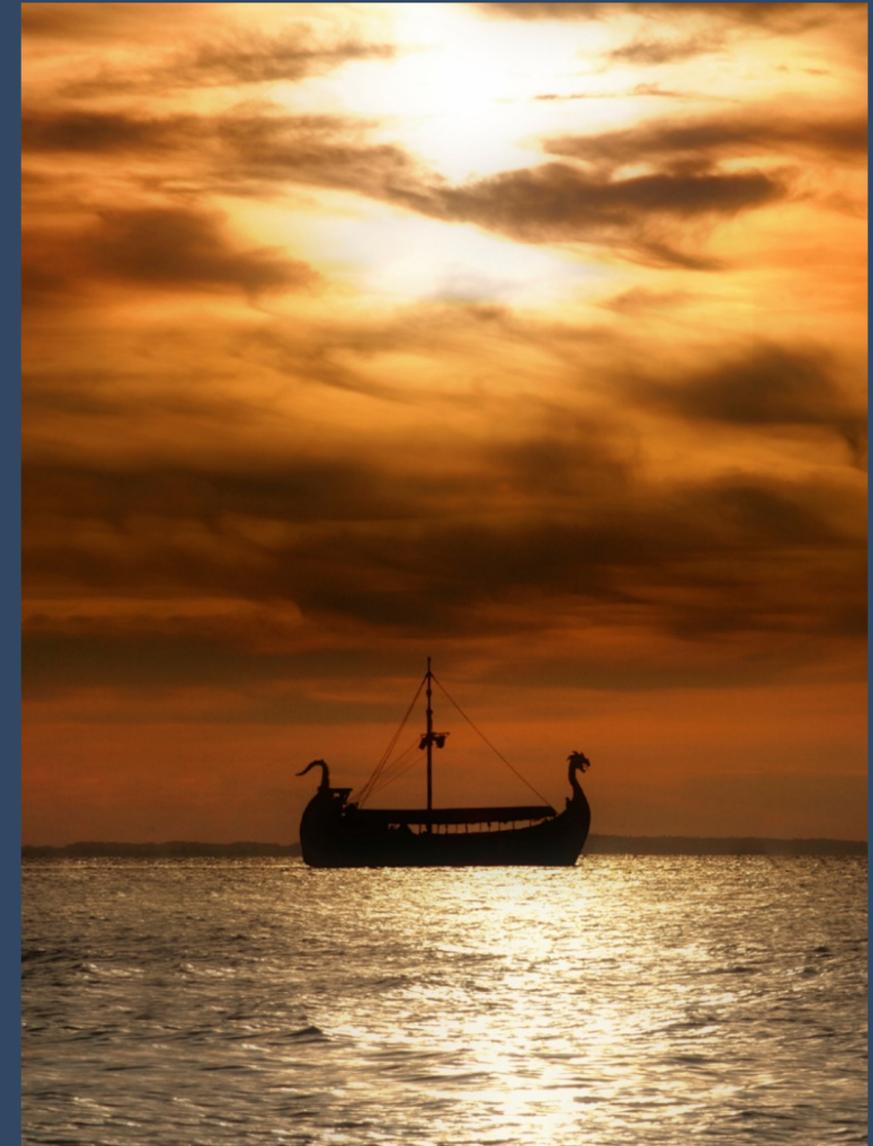


It Is Well with My Soul

4. For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

5. But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!

6. And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be
sight, The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall
descend, Even so, it is well with my soul.



LOSS

Finding Hope That Lasts When Life Falls Apart

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