

Lord, We Lie Before Thy Feet*Joseph Hart (1712–1768)*

Lord, we lie before Thy feet;
 Look on all our deep distress;
 Thy rich mercy may we meet;
 Clothe us with Thy righteousness;
 Stretch forth Thy almighty hand;
 Hold us up, and we shall stand.

Oh that closer we could cleave
 To Thy bleeding, dying breast!
 Give us firmly to believe,
 And to enter into rest.
 Lord, increase, increase our faith!
 Make us faithful unto death.

Let us trust Thee evermore;
 Every moment on Thee call
 For new life, new will, new power:
 Let us trust Thee, Lord for all!
 May we nothing know beside
 Jesus, and Him crucified!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Grappling With Grief***Don Odens*

The phone rang at 5:30 a.m. on Sunday, January 13, 2008. The voice on the other end belonged to the male nurse who had cared for my father in a hospital during the night. He informed me that my 91-year-old father had passed away ten minutes earlier. While we had admitted Dad to the hospital the previous evening, I had no thought that his life would end so soon.

After making phone calls to immediate family members, I was faced with a decision about how to handle my pastoral responsibilities that day. It seemed too short notice to expect my associate to prepare to teach my adult Bible class and preach in the morning service, so I determined to fulfill those duties personally. I had prepared to present the first of three sessions on the Christian and grief that morning! I did not hide the fact of my father's death or my own grief from the class. I was informed that there was not a dry eye in the room as we discussed the biblical perspective of grieving.

The experience of grieving personal loss in death became even more acute as God took my wife of fifty-three years into His presence a few months ago. Many people have asked how I am doing in the interval. My answer is, "I am doing well." That does not mean that I do not sense deep loss. It does not mean that I have no emotional pain. It does not mean that there is no sense of emptiness. It does mean that I have found grace and strength to deal with that loss without losing emotional and spiritual equilibrium.

There has been a great sense of loss. Gloria's mark remains throughout our home, but she is not there. When I entered a supermarket in the weeks following her death, my first thought would be, "What can I buy that is on her diet?" I still do not pass a display of flowers without wanting to take some home to her. I preached in a church several hours from the Twin Cities last weekend. As I began teaching an adult Bible class, I noticed a woman who had been a member of a church I served more than twenty years ago. My first thought was to tell Gloria. I cannot kiss her goodnight or greet her in the morning. I have gone to the grave site where her remains are interred on two occasions, but she is not there!

There are times when my new reality seems to be surreal. Gloria's clothing remained in the closets. I have spent two months sorting through boxes,



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file drawers, and cabinets. Each card, letter, and note she ever received was stored there. Reading them brought back many memories. Many hundreds of photographs remind me of a lifetime of shared experiences. The surreal-ity usually involves the realization that her loss is permanent, that she will not return.

How does this believer in Jesus Christ deal with the grief resulting from death? I have benefited from several positive factors. Traits which I have developed through the years have helped. I tend to deal with issues from a factual perspective rather than a purely emotional perspective. The emotions are present, sometimes powerfully. However, I tend not to make decisions based on emotion. I tend to focus on the future rather than dwelling on the past. Memories flood my mind at times, but I am moving forward as God opens doors of opportunity for ministry. Also, I have attempted through five decades of public ministry to practice what I preach and teach before I teach it. I have counseled and taught others to deal with grief and loss biblically through the years. I am attempting to practice those principles now.

I have kept busy, not as a narcotic to dull the pain, but because there are worthwhile and necessary things to do. I am teaching two courses as a member of the adjunct faculty of Central Seminary. I have a score of commitments to teach and preach this autumn, with more on the horizon. In addition, I have spent more than two months preparing to sell our home and find “right size” housing for the future. Staying busy is a good preventative for self-pity.

Another positive is that Gloria and I experienced *the long goodbye* about which I wrote in this space previously. Therese Rando (*Treatment of Complicated Mourning*) identifies several myths about mourning. Among them are the beliefs that all losses prompt the same type of mourning and that losing someone to a sudden unexpected death is the same as losing someone to an expected death. In my experience they are not identical. While my grief became more intense with Gloria’s physical death, much of my personal mourning occurred earlier over an extended period of time. There was not a cataclysmic shock.

In addition, I have a wonderful support system consisting of family and friends. Our four children have been most helpful. All of them call regularly and help as they have opportunity. One of them calls me every night, taking care of Dad! My godly mother and my six siblings and their mates have provided caring support. Uncounted friends indicate that they continue to pray for me and my family. Some have gone out of their way to provide encouragement and assistance.

Finally, and most importantly, there is the comfort of God’s Word and the ministry of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Psalm 116:15 informs me that the death of His saints is valuable to God. Gloria’s death was not a mistake and

was not wasted! 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 describe the future rapture of the church as the blessed hope of every believer in bold relief against the dark colors of death and grief. I will be reunited with Gloria in that future day when Christ comes to snatch His followers from this world. So, I do grieve, but not like people who are without hope. Our God is truly “the God of all comfort” — and He shares it with me (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).



This essay is by Don Odens, Professor of Homiletics and Expository Preaching at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
