

The Sad Reality of Loss

Loss doesn't quite hit us all the same way. But its effects follow the same pattern. Before we actually lost our children to a society abandoning its roots, and careening down a treacherous mountain pass with no way to stop, there were signs to let us know when it was we actually broke our moorings. Long before our children get drunk, smoke pot or put a needle in their arm, mothers and fathers miss the signs of loss. I'm not going to dwell on the signs. I'm sure every parent, guardian or relative, if they think on it long enough, can recall when it happened. That's what loss does. It either makes you angry, looking for a cause so you can attack it, instead of the real culprit. Or it drives you inward. In some people with a secure foundation that introspection can lead them to eventual peace, passing through the grief process, coming out the other side with healing. In people without a foundation, that process is less clear. All too often politicians and special interests with a cause of their own will make a clear ploy to trap folks in patterns which do not lead to eventual healing.

Blaming a pill for addiction, an oversized soda for obesity, a pencil for misspelling and a gun for murder is like "beating the wind." We never land a blow and it keeps us busy so we avoid when it was we left our foundations. Or, if I were to continue my metaphor, the direction, velocity and cause of wind. Is it a storm? Do we need immediate shelter? Will the shelter hold? A nation which ignores its roots makes an easy target for captivity. Please don't misunderstand me. We need early education concerning addictive behavior. We need early education on how to spell. The tradition of gun ownership always came with early learning lessons, not only on how to shoot, but why life is so precious to begin with.

What holds a child after parenting can no longer have an effect? What can keep a society of children, now turned adults, who have never experienced the security of a foundation that's bigger than themselves, from self-absorption? This brought me to my own life. I had plenty of time as a kid to get in trouble. All the culprits which make a society sick: sex, drugs and alcohol were ever-present to woo and seduce. In our modern society, it is nearly impossible to keep our children from their influence. That's when my introspection became a reality. I had a love of reading that is not easily explained. My grandmother— Nana, for those of you who were blessed enough to have one— read to me constantly. Mom was a single mother and work was not a luxury. This love of reading brought me into my mother and stepdad's library every morning before sunrise to read their encyclopedias! It did something else. It made me pick up a book larger than myself and larger than the world, past and future, that it described. That's right, I picked up a Bible.

Before you get all mad at me, or accuse me of “preying on weak minds,” hear me out. Regardless of whether you have read it, hate it without studying it, or love it, or any other opinion concerning its attributes, it showed me some things. As a child, teenager and young adult, I read within its pages stories about hatred, jealousy, addiction to all sorts of behaviors, murder, killing, sacrifice. I read all about human nature and I read something else. I read about this Being who loved the outcast, turned the “wise in their own eyes” into bumbling idiots, performed miracles— yes, that old “walking on water” thing— and I read about love. True love, not fake love, not simple or impassioned human emotions. I learned the true source of love and what it meant to embody that kind of love. It was way beyond my definitions. There was so much in the book I didn’t understand as a child— thought I knew more about as a young adult— and then realized I knew nothing as a “grown-up.” But I kept reading. I had never read a book in which I decided to read it over again, and again, and well, by now I can’t count how often I have read it through. It is the only book that has kept my attention long enough to read that way. In that book I learned about generations, governments, politics, families, evil, spiritual beings and “flying things” or the ruler of flying things. I learned about this thing called covenant. Like other things in the book, I didn’t quite understand that concept as a child, but I did realize this Being the book described wanted to covenant with humans. The audacity of that thought freaked me out. But there it was, over and over again, said in so many different ways: “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28, NET Bible®) “Turn to me so you can be delivered, all you who live in the earth’s remote regions! For I am God, and I have no peer.” (Isaiah 45:22 NET Bible®)

It was obvious the New Testament was easier and seemed kinder than the Old Testament, but I had no clue why as a child, except Jesus of the New Testament was very different. Knowing the book as a child did not help me escape the ever-purulent and prevailing societal fascination with sex, drugs and alcohol. But when the lure of societal narcissism would have swallowed me whole, those words of a humble savior sounded healing: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16, 17 KJV) Here was a very different world from the one my young adult self lived in. As a young adult living in a heavily populated city environment, I had responsibilities and a job which called for my constant attention. In fact, I was trying to find a parking space in the New York City metro area when an “event” caused me to give thanks for an unbelievable and “miraculous” find: A parking space right in front of the building I needed to be in!

A crisis in our family had arrived and we had a family member who was constantly “searching” for their father. It confused me somewhat because I had grown up knowing only my grandfather and uncles, which was not very different from this relative. Why were they in a constant flux concerning their identity and the identity of their father? Finding that parking space so quickly gave me a few moments to thank God for the spot and then ask Him a question. Me and this individual were not so far apart. We had both grown up with almost exactly similar male role models and had both grown up without biological “dad” in the house. I had a more ‘protestant’ upbringing with a public school (pre-1979) education, while they had a more ‘catholic’ upbringing while being sent to private catholic schools. Otherwise, we were not that different. My exact question to God: “Why do they have this need for the identity of their father constantly? What’s wrong with me that I just don’t feel the need to worry about it?”

The psychologists and psychoanalysts among you will probably give answers based on nature, nurture and DNA. The reality is we grew up in almost the exact same households, with biological DNA. I won’t go into the events which caused our family to live apart and together at different life stages. Our similarities in nature, nurture and literal DNA simply could not explain this ‘identity crisis’ or its lack. It was God’s answer which blew me away. I will never forget it. When I asked, “Why aren’t I constantly searching for my father?” He said, “That’s because I have been your Father all along.” Instantly a flood of memories came crashing through: me sitting for hours reading that crazy book, the Bible, asking questions as a child, remaining confused with the answers and wondering about this Jesus. Early mornings reading encyclopedias with the sun peaking behind trees and streaming into the living room. A peace would settle against the sunlit walls where the house was still sleeping, awaiting the aroma of my “job” as a child of making the first coffee pot of the day. In those days we didn’t have coffee makers, just a flame, water, grinds and a pot.

As those memory waves moved on the shores of my present reality, I had another realization. It was subtle, barely whispering its existence, but I had images in my spirit-man of being cared for by Someone. You may not want to call him God. Some of you may call it an angel and the atheist among you might say I’m mad. But with an overwhelming sense of awareness I knew this voice spoke the truth. This Being had watched over me all my young and quite often, foolish life. I knew when I prayed as a child He answered. In fact, it was kind of spooky back then. I learned early on to be careful what I prayed because He listened and things happened. This full blown awareness of God as MY FATHER had carried me through years of teenage idiocy and secular seduction, bringing me to a place of awareness on the other side of human stupidity.

Sitting in the car that day, thanking Him for a ‘miracle’ parking spot made me so appreciative of His voice, giving me a sense of worth and understanding concerning my identity. I did not know who I could be in Christ, but I knew Whose Hand I needed to hold to get wherever I was going. It’s that journey called life that we are all on. We help people along the way and people help us. We learn the embodiment of covenant: It’s called community. We learn the stability necessary for a community to work and we learn when behavior saps the strength of a community. We learn how and why behaviors hurt, where they originate from and how to help those trapped in the grip of denial. This takes relationship. That’s my third pattern or concept for what holds a child when parenting is lost. Knowledge of the Bible, the love and knowledge of Father God, and finally, a relationship with Him. Knowing the Bible, even knowing about God and His love, cannot keep people from being religiously idiotic. But couple biblical knowledge and God-awareness with the reality of an up close and personal relationship with the Holy Spirit and you have a child on their way to fulfilling their destiny call. They know why they were created. They learn who they are and they understand when it is time to ‘get over ones’ self’!

Family relationships can do a great job in raising those kinds of children. Unfortunately, in a society full of press and politicians who are controlling and self-absorbed, it can be hard to raise healthy children. These ‘leaders’ make laws to promote an ever-endorsing, self-promoting polity. The laws they create remove God-given choice and the responsibility which comes with it. When you do that you remove self-government. When you remove self-government, you remove the healthy responsibility which comes from making bad choices. Choices have consequences. Every child who touches the hot stove learns the sound of mom’s voice as a warning never to touch a hot stove again. What happens to a society where there are no moms and dads? The bottom line is even if no one else steps in to help those young souls, there is a book. There can be a Sunday school teacher or other helper, librarian or volunteer, who says, “let me show you the love of a book; let me show you how to read.”

Our founding fathers in America were not the elite of Europe. They were not the guardians of Roman government. They were not the philosophers of Greece. They were hard working commoners. No, they were not the royalty of England, but they were well read. From the very beginning, the pastors in pulpits and other ministers of the church taught American children. They taught them how to read and they taught them how to read their Bibles. They learned lessons which made them prosperous. Generations later, this foundation would bring them through a war in which they were out-gunned, out-numbered and out-monied. Those early biblical

lessons helped them build a nation filled with common folk. While the Bible couldn't remove the pain of the loss they experienced after losing loved ones in a war for independence, it did give them hope for a future. It gave them an identity of an America in which leaders were servants, not elitist and not kings. It gave them a relationship through a community of covenant in which they worked hard and built a nation of communities. Those biblical lessons compelled honesty and transparency in government, which is something you don't see in our present Federal apparatus.

You may not come from a perfect family, but there is a book, which if read, can put you in a position to avoid the traps this world offers. Your background might make you work even harder and longer than others. But this one book can offer you a relationship with a God who can lighten your work load. Your past experience may have led to pain and sorrow. But this one book can help you know about a God who says this: . . . “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Psalm 30:5, KJV)