



The Smiling Maven

Grace for Grace (John 1:16)
חסד על חסד (יוחנן א'טו)

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Book Review: A Grief Observed

On our website we posted the following question: Which author wrote the following? *“Don’t come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect that you don’t understand.”* We gave the following choices:

- A.) Edgar Allen Poe
- B.) Ernest Hemingway
- C.) J.D. Salinger
- D.) C. S. Lewis
- E.) George MacDonald

We could have asked this follow-up question: Who said *“But come to Him (God) when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find: A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside.* We could give the same five possible choices of authors.

I wonder how many people would suspect that the quotes came from one of the first three authors, all of whom are considered secular authors. They are not known as strong witnesses of faith. Maybe, some would suspect George MacDonald, though a

man of faith, his writings and defense of the faith, are not as well known as those of C.S. Lewis. C.S. Lewis is often considered the most influential Christian writer of the 20th century. He is well known for his powerful defense and intellectual support of genuine faith in Jesus as the resurrected Son of God. The preceding quotes sound rather secular, humanistic, and not very supportive of faith. Yet, both quotes come from C.S. Lewis, and from his book, A Grief Observed.

It is one of six books that helped me through the most difficult years of grief after my wife Sandy’s death. Each of these books had a common denominator of a genuine understanding of grace. When we are grieving or struggling or when we are hurting, our capacity to “pull ourselves up by the bootstraps” disappears. The reality of the gospel, and of genuine grace, is that our bootstraps are never sufficient. Believers, apart from grief and apart from struggles, have a tendency to emphasize our own capacity, including our own spiritual capacity, and neglect the very humanness, frailty, and some-

times simple baseness of our condition. A Grief Observed is a view into C.S. Lewis’ struggle of grief over the loss of his wife. It is a powerful picture that even the strongest of us, the most firm and convinced believer, is still a frail human being, and one subject to suffering and its corresponding emotional agony. That is not abnormal. It is not because one is not genuine in his faith.

Jesus said that He went to prepare a place for us. Those who have gone to this place, prepared for them, are out of pain, out of discomfort and away from the struggles of this life. Yet, the bereaved are still without that loved one. They still need to face the reality that the loved one is no longer here on this earth. They have to face life – without that person. That hurts, and it hurts a lot!! There is a struggle over the reality that one

This feature article, “A Grief Observed” has been planned for over a year. In the past few months we have received news from numerous readers concerning the recent loss of a loved one. It is our hope and prayer that these articles on grief will be helpful in some way.

Thoughts on Grieving

Losing a spouse is one of the greatest stresses one may experience in life. Somehow, I have experienced this loss while also suffering some very painful physical ailments. On top of that dynamic duo of *tsouris*, was the daily stress of pastoring a church and raising two young children.

I have not gone through it perfectly. Far, far, far from it. It is now almost eight years since Sandy’s death, and I still have moments of intense loss and frustration. At times they are almost unbearable. They may be less frequent than in the years immediately after Sandy’s death, but the intensity is no different. In a real sense, it is like the absence of half of me. The scripture says that a man shall leave his mother and father and shall be joined to his wife and they shall become one - *echad*. How can one live as a half of a composite unity? God said it was not good for Adam to be alone; he needed a helpmate; they would both be halves in the wonder whole of marriage. So how does a human being survive the loss of this valuable helpmate when she dies at 37, and leaves an 8-year old and 5-year old. I have a very simple answer: I don’t know! It is continually

amazing to me that I am alive, that I continue to breath. My children are healthy, reasonably well balanced, doing okay at school, and involved in extra-curricular activities. Somehow, I have managed to single-parent them for the last 7 plus years. Grace, Grace, Grace.

Has my faith stayed solid? Maybe, it depends on how you define solid. Does it mean that I have been faithful in prayer, Bible reading, evangelism, and my own personal zeal to walk with Jesus? If that is what is meant by faith, the answer is a definite no. If it means, that I have consistently believed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the World, and that He is resurrected from the dead; then the answer is a definite “yes.” Even in the darkest, hardest, times after Sandy’s death, even when my own attitude was lousy, and I was angry, frustrated, and possibly defiant towards Jesus, I could not say that Jesus was not real, that He was not who He claimed to be. It is actually quite amazing.

A number of months after Sandy’s death, I had what would turn out to be a very significant conversation. My good friend Jim

The Smiling Maven

The Smiling Maven is a bi-monthly Jewish flavored newsletter sharing God’s incredible grace. There is a desire to communicate God’s grace with Jews and Gentiles. There is coming a spiritual atomic bomb of that incredible grace. It is an imminent spiritual explosion soon to happen in Israel that will have a wonderfully awesome affect in Israel and all the world.

Life is often hard. Suffering is a very real part of life. Sometimes suffering enables us to see more clearly the reality that God loves us. He loves us unconditionally; it is not based on how we are doing. We may begin to understand the wonder of God’s salvation through Messiah Y’shua. Grace might actually be breaking through into our lives. It is the experience of grace that can generate the most genuine of genuine smiles.

Maven is a Yiddish word that means a person with special knowledge or experience. Evidence of God’s grace should be characterized by an ability to smile. The Smiling Maven newsletter is an encouragement for all of us to be smiling mavens, smiling people with special knowledge of God’s amazing grace.

The Home Front—Basketball, A Job, Youth Group, and Comedor

Basketball season has come with double vision. Last year Ruthe played basketball for the freshmen team at Zion Benton High School. This year, she is playing for the sophomore team at Zion Benton. Caleb, who is now at Central Junior High, tried out for the 7th grade team, and made it.

Caleb played on a Basketball team two years ago at Oshkosh Christian School. At that time, Ruthe was playing at Merrill Middle School.

Ruthe and Caleb's basketball season this year seem somewhat of a repeat of that year. Ruthe, who is more of a natural athlete, is a starter on the sophomore team. In fact, she is one of the best players on the team. However, the overall talent of the team is somewhat lacking. They have only won one game. It can be quite frustrating for Ruthe. The coach puts some extra pressure on her, and she does the best she can, but they



Ruthe and the Zion Zee Bees

are not the Chicago Bulls. Caleb, the tallest on his team, is not as much of a natural athlete as his sister. In this sense Ruthe takes after her mom, Caleb after his dad. Caleb has improved tremendously at basketball, does receive playing time, and occasionally starts. However, his team is fantastic. Their record is presently 15-4. They can almost look like the Chicago Bulls. The



Caleb and the Central Pirates

games that they have lost have been tournament games, not area

division games. Dad goes to Ruthe's games and sees his daughter play a lot. She is one of the better players, but they usually lose. Dad goes to Caleb's games, and sees his son play a small part of the game. He is not one of the best players, but his team almost always wins. What an interesting contrast.

In other home front news, Ruthe has a job as an intern with the Lake County Sheriff's department. They agreed to hire her, and accommodate her basketball season. She worked some hours during Christmas vacation, and will work more regularly after basketball season is over. Caleb is again attending a youth group. It is encouraging to see him interact with other youth in a faith setting.

This past summer, our cat Comedor returned to us. Pets such as dogs and cats are not permitted in the Faith Homes. So we gave him away prior to moving here in the summer of 2005. However the family that took him, moved to California this past summer. They contacted us and wanted to know if we wanted him back. At that point we were now renting a small cottage adjacent to the Faith Homes. We do not "live" in the cottage, but use the front room as an office for the Smiling Maven and the back as a family room. This situation enabled us to bring Comedor to Zion. He lives in the cottage. While he was away from us, and living on a farm, he developed some medical problems. The first was a tapeworm. That was treated rather easily. The second problem has been crystals in his bladder. This has been a bigger problem. Comedor has been on a special diet, medication, and has taken numerous trips to the vet. It has been rather stressful for all of us. Of course we know that cats are not human, but the furry feline fellow is rather dear to us. If you are a pet lover, and can handle it theologically, please pray that Comedor heals from this condition.



Comedor—*The Cat*



A Grief Observed (continued from page 1)

day that person was here, and now they are not. Lewis touches on many of the common experiences of grieving. In addition to grieving our loss, we grieve over the fact that we are grieving. We struggle with knowing that we are struggling. God designed us with emotions; He designed us with the capacity to care, to miss, to enjoy, to hurt. Grieving hurts because someone who was loved and appreciated is now gone. They are no longer physically present.

A Grief Observed is not a typical C.S. Lewis book (though one might not call any of his books typical). He did not write this with the intention of publishing it. It is his own journal writings as he struggled over the death of his wife. We see his own struggle, his own grief unmasked. There are many musings, thoughts, questions, struggles. As one follows Lewis' journey in A Grief Observed, one can see some of Lewis' questions and struggles come to resolution. Others do not. That is part of the journey. That is part of the process. Catching a glimpse of Lewis' journey of grief helps others to know that they are not alone in the bewilderment, hurting, aching, seeming unspiritual, sometimes angry, and so often confusing journey

Thoughts on Grieving (continued from page 1)

(who is a professional counselor) called to see how I was doing. I was managing. I was holding steady. He shared with me that one of the stages of grief was anger. I told him, somewhat defensively, that was not my experience at that time. He said, maybe not now, but you may reach that stage at some point. I was still somewhat defensive about the subject, and he must have sensed it. He then asked me, "Art, you may not be there now, but you may some day; you might be angry, you might be angry with God. If that happens (and he paused),do you think that God can handle it?" I considered the wisdom of his question and responded, "I guess so." As I look back upon that conversation, I am very thankful for this wisdom. It helped me to be honest and open, (and angry) when the time finally did come. Like other aspects of grieving, that type of emotional response has faded, and does not happen with great frequency, but there are still times when it surfaces. I am increasingly confident that: "God is able to handle it."

The Smiling Maven

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Someone needing to Smile More

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