

The LandBetween

MINISTRIES

The mission of the LandBetween Ministries is to equip leaders to fulfill Christ's Great Commission of heart-focused discipleship in a broken world.

NEWSLETTER

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CHISELED MARBLE & FACING LOSSES

THE MACEDONIAN FOUNTAIN

While doing church history research in Macedonia a few months ago, I heard chiseling work echoing through the narrow streets, so I hiked I up the road to investigate.

In the courtyard of an Orthodox Church, a craftsman (see photo) was carefully chiseling marble. He was very kind and seemed glad I showed interest in his work.

With a weathered face and strong hands, this experienced craftsman was taking smooth marble and making it rough in certain areas in order to emphasize the crosses he left untouched.

He showed me his tools: A simple chisel and short-handled hammer. He enthusiastically pointed at the future water fountain and with a smile and sense of dignity said, "Macedonian marble!"

This wasn't just any marble from any country, but from the same region the apostle Paul went to after receiving his "Macedonian Call" (Acts 16:6-10).

WHAT'S THE POINT?

The point is that just as the craftsman used his chisel to take away parts of the marble fountain, there are times God allows people and

things to be taken from our lives (Job 1:21). The question is not *if* people or things close to our hearts will be taken away, but *how* will we respond *when* they are gone?

FOCUS ON GOD'S PRESENCE

For the most part, when the topic of loss is discussed, Bible teachers point to people like Job in the Old Testament losing his health, wealth, and family. This time, it may help to start with a different approach: Instead of *first* focusing on us and our



response to loss, how does the Creator God handle loss or grief? Yes, God owns everything, so technically He cannot lose anything. But, from a relational perspective, when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, there was a break and a loss of the perfect union that He had with Adam and Eve. God could have seen this "loss" and responded to it by running away from Adam in anger and disgust. Instead, God does just the opposite.

God stayed in a "relational" mode. The first thing God said was healthy and relational when He asked

Adam the question: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). God knew Adam's location. Yet, the question about Adam's location needs to be seen in the context of Genesis 3:8, where it states that God was *there* in the Garden *with* Adam and Eve.

The Bible does not say they could see Him, but it makes it clear Adam and Eve could hear Him and could tell He was near them. What was their response to His presence? They tried to hide.

When one suffers loss, the universal temptation is to ignore God's presence as one tries to hide from grief and loss. People try to hide from loss and its pain through isolation, excessive food, alcohol, or anger that leads to bitterness (Ecclesiastes 7:1-10; Ephesians 4:31) and many other sinful responses.

God shows us at the beginning of the inspired Word that a healthy way to handle loss is to accept and appreciate the loving and loyal presence of God Himself.

God can allow our loved ones to be taken away, as well as our worldly possessions, as happened to many in the financial crash of 2008.

But the truth of God's omnipresence is real and eternal, even when we may think that nobody cares. A timeless truth is that God always cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

The Psalmist wrote, "But as for me, God's presence is all I need. I have made the sovereign LORD my...

...shelter, as I declare all the things you have done.” (Psalm 73:28; NET).

While in excruciating pain and struggling to breathe during His final moments on the cross, notice how Jesus maintained a relational attitude toward the repentant thief:

“And He said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’” (Luke 23:43; NASB).

“...with Me...” is the presence of Jesus and is the greatest blessing one can have in a sinful world. The sustaining power of God being with us through His Spirit and its fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.) can sustain us through great loss and pain if we humbly welcome the comfort and divine presence of Jesus Christ.

JONAH AND THE...TREE

Although the life of Jonah is often related to a large fish, it is good to see how God ends the book of Jonah: Jonah was still in a state of anger. God had said He was going to punish the Ninevites, but God changed His course when He saw they turned (repented) from their evil ways (Jonah 3:10).

In a huff, Jonah built himself a shelter out of town, away from the Ninevites. God caused a tree to quickly grow up to protect Jonah from the searing ancient Near Eastern sun. Jonah was happy about the benefits the plant provided until God chose to take it away. Then Jonah’s anger, still simmering under the surface, exploded against God.

Then God asked Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” (Jonah 4:9). God had already challenged Jonah about Jonah’s anger against Him (4:1-4).

Notice how Jonah was angry about things external to him: Repentant Ninevites and losing his shade tree. But God was focused on Jonah’s heart; and if Jonah believed God was *God* and if he believed God was *good*. When we face losses, like Jonah’s loss of his shade tree (which was never Jonah’s in the first place) we need to ask, “Was whatever I ‘lost’ ever ‘mine’ in the first place?” We would do well to put aside the anger over what we claim are losses and appreciate God’s blessings; specifically, His loving presence. Jonah had more passion for something that made him comfortable (the tree) than he did for God’s loving heart for the lost Ninevites.



IS JESUS A LOSER? A FAILURE?

I’ve heard it said that Jesus was a “loser” and a “failure.”

But is this true? It depends if you believe the Word of God or human opinions. The Word of God says that victory over death comes through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). Jesus did not fail or lose, even humanly speaking. Jesus sets the definition of true loss or gain, both spiritually *and* physically.

Jesus is victorious. He was never a failure as the Messiah or the King of kings. Although He did claim to be, and is, the Messiah (John 4:25-26, etc.), Jesus never said His kingdom was of *this* world or He would have fought being arrested. (John 18:36).

Colossians 2:15 says, “And having

disarmed the powers and authorities, he (Jesus) made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” The now-*empty* cross, as depicted on the marble fountain, is a symbol of *victory*, not loss.

Don’t let those who mistreat you leave you in a state of loss as they try to “chisel” you with their hurtful, evil words or actions. Instead, in prayer resist the devil. (James 4:7). Don’t let other people and their “chisels” cause you to lose hope. Like the craftsman shaped the marble in Macedonia, let God shape your character to be even more loving and hope-filled in these days.

Millions of believers in Jesus have “lost” their lives to evil people who hate, and the killings are increasing. The global anti-Christian movement is growing. Yet, we are called to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48) regardless of the “losses” we may encounter. Even if you suffer great loss by the world’s standards, you gain more than what the world defines as success by personally knowing Jesus Christ. (Phil. 3:7-11).

When life chips away at you, you can choose to let your life shine with the Light of Jesus, like freshly hewn marble glistens in the sun (Matthew 5:16). A core aspect of trusting Jesus is relying on His definition of actual gains and losses; if you fully trust in the eternal Rock your mind will be steady and at peace. (Isaiah 26:3-4).

THE FOUNTAIN OF FOREVER

One day, water will flow over the marble fountain in Macedonia. One day, believers will be with Jesus in Paradise, who was chiseled to the cross so we could *gain* the living water of His Spirit (John 7:37-39) and never suffer loss again.