

# Grieving With Hope

By Joel Dougherty

*Almost one year ago, Allison Steddom wrote an article on “Learning to Lament” after losing her brother, Alex, while they were on a short-term ministry trip in Northern Ireland. It was a heart-wrenching, yet hope-giving reflection on the agony of death and the glory of the resurrection. Now we have been plunged into a season of lament once again with the passing of the Pals family, who were preparing to go to Japan. I have asked Joel Dougherty, the brother-in-law of Jamison and Kathryne, to help us capture some of the lessons as we learn to lament again and grieve with resurrection hope.*

—Pastor Jason Meyer

Our Jamison, Kathryne, Ezra, Violet, and Calvin went to be with Christ on July 31, 2016. The seeds have been sown (1 Corinthians 15:37), cast across the highway. They careened into sleep (1 Corinthians 15:18). Death reared its monstrous head. Our dear ones are gone.

How do we stand against the devil’s schemes, these five flaming arrows? How do we bear up under this suffocating providence? Just as we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we also believe that “through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). We believe because of what Jesus said (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; cf. Matthew 24:30–31; Mark 13:26–27; Luke 21:27).<sup>1</sup>

This conviction steadies us as we respond to death. To live as a Christian is to walk a high wire that lurches and sways with suffering. Faith in the coming resurrection is our balancing pole. It also reminds us of our destination. It enables us to inch forward—to grieve with hope—saving us from danger on either side. Without grief, we slip into denial. Without hope, we pitch into despair.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Paul reminds the Thessalonian church of the resurrection, so that they “may not grieve

as others do who have no hope.” Describing grief in this way accomplishes two things. First, it discourages us from denying our sorrow. If we take Paul’s statement at face value, he either prohibits us from grieving when confronted with death or he prohibits us from grieving in a certain way. However, the first option conflicts with his other writings.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on a time when Epaphroditus became ill and nearly died, he writes, “God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” (Philippians 2:27). Elsewhere, he exhorts the Roman church to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26). All of this is instructive for us. We need not fear grief in the face of death, even if it scars us, provided that we remember our hope. As one writer observed, “He who broke the bonds of death kept his wounds.”<sup>3</sup>

Second, this way of describing grief keeps us from despair. We who believe in Christ do not grieve “as others do who have no hope.” Death is not the final verdict for us. The sufferings of this present time provoke deep groaning, but even so “we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). In fact, “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3–5).

So, how shall we stand firm despite death’s sadistic taunt? By taking up the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16). By clinging to hope in the resurrected and returning Christ. Though we refuse to deny our sorrow, we will not despair. ●

<sup>1</sup> See further Jeffrey A.D. Weima, “1–2 Thessalonians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 880.

<sup>2</sup> This argument is adapted from Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians, Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 218.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 93.