

A Shared Grief

Max Lucado wants Christians to maintain hope in the middle of the coronavirus outbreak—but he also wants them to know it's OK to grieve. The global pandemic has completely upended life in nearly every country on earth, causing no small amount of death, loss and trauma for millions. Lucado, a bestselling author and pastor, says it's not incomparable to collective global tragedies like the 9/11 terror attacks or the 2008 financial crisis—particularly for younger Americans who may not vividly remember those experiences.

"There is some wonderful wisdom that comes with years," Lucado says. "I am 65, and I was very active in trying to help people get through 9/11. I remember the tragic economic downturn of 2008. ... So I say to [those] who have not gone through a tragedy like this, 'Be kind to yourself. Take it one day at a time. But we get through things. God gets His people through things. It may not be quick, and it may not be painless. And far be it from me to say how long this is going to take. But I am very confident that our heavenly Father will get us through it.'"

Lucado is doing his part to help promote hope and be there for people who need it—even in a world of social distancing. He's made an online video Bible study based on his book *Anxious for Nothing* available free online at [www.maxlucado.com](#), and he's also doing regular (often daily) check-ins through his YouTube channel, where he provides an 8-10-minute word of encouragement.

Yet in talking to *Charisma*, Lucado says he wonders if the hopelessness and anxiety so many feel right now is a form of societal grief.

"I've been calling it anxiety, and I do think anxiety is prevalent," Lucado says. "But somebody mentioned [to me] the other day that they're feeling a sense of sadness, and I

thought, *You know what? I think that's true.* I think we're sad. I think there's a kind of societal sadness. We've expressed a loss—a loss of normalcy, a loss of opportunity. For some, it's purely on an entertainment level: We've lost opening day baseball, the vacation we were planning for the kids to go to the beach at spring or the chance to go to Disneyland. There's that level of loss. And then there's the deeper level of loss, and that is the loss of security, the loss of assurance, the loss of feeling like we are safe. And that is really deep."

Free to Feel

For decades, Lucado has met with people struggling with grief and tragedy—making him uniquely equipped to speak to this present moment. He begins by clarifying what exactly he means when he refers to grief.

"Grief at its core is an unmet expectation," Lucado says. "We expected to have longer with our loved one, and now we're at their funeral. Or we expected to have a wonderful retirement, and now our retirement savings are in jeopardy. We expected to go on a cruise this summer. I'm just [giving examples] here. But these are expectations that we have."

He says he learned what it means to truly grieve while working as a missionary in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with several young couples. He became very close to these families as he served alongside them.

"We rejoiced greatly when two of our team members, Marty and Angela, announced that she was pregnant with their first child," Lucado says. "But the pregnancy was difficult, and I remember how the joy became concern. Angela was told to stay in bed. We were to stay in prayer. And we prayed. She stayed in bed. And the Lord answered our prayers, but not the way we desired. He took that child into heaven before that child was allowed to live on earth."

"I'll never forget my good friend Marty's comment. He said, 'More than a baby died, Max. A dream died.' And grief is more than the burial of a person. It is really the burial of an expectation or a dream or a hope or an aspiration. And I think that's what we're dealing with right now."

Thankfully, Lucado says that identifying the feeling as grief is the first step to addressing and healing that hurt.

"I think if we can name something, we can manage it better," Lucado says. "If we can say, 'Oh, OK, this is grief,' then how have I handled grief in the past? How did I manage grief when my grandmother died or when I buried my good friend? When mourning comes, what do we do?"

Free to Hope

Many readers have likely heard of the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Lucado says this illustrates that there are many different ways to grieve—all of which are normal and understandable—and that we should reasonably expect that others' reactions to the pandemic may not mirror our own.

"We need to understand that all of us are at a different place, and sometimes those stages of grief don't come in the sequence," Lucado says. "Sometimes anger comes before denial. But we need to understand that all of us are at different stages of this grief. This really gets compounded because we're stuck under the same roof. There might be a husband who is saying, 'This is all a hoax. We need to just move on,' and he's angry at it. And he's married to somebody who is just deeply, deeply sad about the whole situation. It's difficult. They need to come to an understanding that not everybody responds in the same way."

Lucado says that, in a nutshell, people had certain expectations for how 2020 was going to play out, and now they have had to bury those expectations. He says he recommends two

key steps for people grappling with disappointment. First, he says, allow yourself to grieve. And second, remember that this season is temporary; God will lead you out the other side.

"I've said this several times on several broadcasts, but I think you've got to let yourself have a meltdown or two—or 10," Lucado says. "Maybe go in the bathroom and turn the water on if you don't want everybody to hear you, but just let yourself cry. Let yourself grieve. You've got to do that. There's nothing in the Bible about suppressing our grief. I mean, for crying out loud, there's a whole book called Lamentations. There is a necessary and a healthy part of lamenting. God wants us to face our sorrows with His help. Dismissal and denial are not a part of God's grief therapy."

Lucado says this is proven by the example of King David, who was called a man after God's own heart. His grief is documented again and again through his life and writings.

"When King David learned of the death of Saul and Jonathan, David and the entire army tore their clothing, wept aloud and fasted until sunset—even ordered that the people of Judah sing a funeral song," Lucado says. "So death or sadness was never soft-pedaled or passed over. We have to face it, fight it, question it and even be angry at it, but we shouldn't deny it. Solomon said there is a time to mourn. It is a time to mourn."

Yet Lucado says we will not grieve forever. After we have been able to truly and feel our emotions, God will guide us through this tragic season.

"We claim the promise that comes from the 23rd Psalm that God will lead us through the valley of the shadow of death," he says. "He doesn't leave us in it—He leads us through it. 'Weeping may come for the night,' wrote the psalmist, 'but joy comes in the morning.' So let weeping happen. But let's don't think for a second that this is going to be a permanent state of affairs. God is going to get us through this, and He's

going to lift our spirits. Let yourself grieve, but let yourself also indulge in a faith-based hope that our God rose from the dead. The same God who defeated death, who's now ascended and seated at the right hand at the throne of heaven, is going to walk us through this and restore joy to our hearts."

Lucado says he practices turning over his anxieties, his fears and his grief every morning during quiet time with the Lord.

"I start every morning in a little storage room in our house," Lucado says. "... I get down on the floor and start off on my knees. But within two minutes, I'm on my belly. And I just lie there before God. I'm a pathetic sight. I haven't shaven. I haven't done my hair. I'm still in my pajamas. But I just pray. I say, *Lord, I just need enough strength for today. Just get me through please today.* The prayer is not full of poetry. It's not fancy language. It's just heartfelt and honest. I pray in the spirit. I pray to the Spirit. I try to remember every promise I can, and I stand on those. And I think that's what we have got to do."

Though the world may be grieving and in a season of loss for now, Lucado does not believe it will last forever. He looks forward with hope and faith toward a time when the coronavirus-like other national tragedies—is a memory of the past, a milestone in the lives of billions. But for now, the grief is real—and that is OK. God can use our grief.

"I think God is calling his people to Himself, and He's calling the people who have turned away from home," Lucado says. "It's a time of turning and returning. I think this is a defining moment for the church. We have what the people need: hope and encouragement and life. If [your readers] have God—if they said yes to Jesus, Jesus said yes to them—the Holy Spirit lives within you. So speak. Speak words of hope, whenever you have the opportunity. Speak words of life. This is not the time to be arrogant or condescending; it's a time to be

humble, to present the gospel, to love people through deeds and words. This is a great opportunity for the church. I really believe that.” {eoa}

Taylor Berglund *is the associate editor of Charisma magazine and the host of several podcasts on the Charisma Podcast Network.*