

David Crowder Ponders Life, Pain and Hope

David Crowder and Mike Hogan of the David Crowder Band offer a simple yet difficult truth that life at its fullest includes pain and sorrow. When we encounter hardships, we want comfort, and we want answers. Crowder and Hogan help us find those answers and give us hope in their book Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven, but Nobody Wants to Die. The Buzz offers an excerpt from their book.

There are some deaths which, upon occurrence, arrest the considerations of the public at large. There is something—be it the public visibility of the individual or the curiously unusual or wholly universal circumstances surrounding the death—that coerces our attention and empathy.

For me, the first recognition of this phenomenon was while sitting at the bar with my wife at the Red Lobster in Waco, Texas. We were waiting on a table. It was September 1, 1997. The televisions scattered around us announced that an English princess had died. Our collective grief ignited; a planet wept. I cried right along. Sitting there with cheese sticks and a Dr Pepper, I cried for a princess I didn't even know.

The *New York Times* reported that the posture of the massive crowds of mourners appeared to hold “something more Latin than British ... the intensity of people's words and actions; a largely Protestant culture that epitomizes restraint and values privacy was galvanized by a need to display its powerful emotions publicly.”

As a funeral procession advanced through the corridor of overt grief that lined Kensington High Street winding toward Westminster Abbey, we joined through television sets and radio broadcasts. Physical distance was overcome by empathetic

proximity, or the transferable nearness of emotional presence. Death united us, pulled us together. In excess of a million bouquets, garlands, sprays of flowers, cards and signs bearing our sentiments rested in front of royal palaces. Questions came from the mourners: How could someone attempting such good die so dreadfully? Did it have to come so unforeseen and immediate? Was this real? Was she really gone? How can she be gone?

Within minutes of four pistol shots being fired outside a New York City apartment located at the corner of 72nd Street and Central Park West, crowds gathered to mourn the death of John Lennon. There was Columbine. There was Oklahoma City. There was September 11th. Before these, two wars involving no less than the entire planet; at least, that's what their titles indicate. More crowds. More collective tears.

You know how sometimes in the middle of the summer—when rain has been scarce and the sun has been hot and the ground is dry and cracked—a storm hits? The water comes in torrents, sounding its arrival with claps of thunder and cracks in the sky. It's all too much for the soil to hold, and then suddenly, violently there is a flood. Grief arrives with this force. It is itself a force, unstoppable, and no one is safe from it. Once upon a time, we almost drowned from the grief of God.

If the earth were a cup, it would seem too utterly small to contain our collected grief; the gathered tears will spill over.

In his book *Buried Communities*, Kurt Fosso writes: "The loss of a family member or close friend can easily spark a desire for the social possibilities afforded by sharing one's grief with others, particularly when that grief is felt to be burdensome or even unbearable. It seems clear from these social manifestations that for such grief to be shared there must be something common to those who gather together, whether

what is imparted is grief for the deceased or the unique problems of grief itself. One widower or widow or friend or neighbor seeks out another for comfort and for the particular kind of social cohesion offered by mutual mourning ... that sense of shared, personal loss."

Commonality is significant to our belonging; to share similar characteristics or homogenous qualities with those around us brings a profound sense of comfort. In a moment of public tragedy, it seems it is enough just to be human; that our condition here, situated on planet Earth, with flesh and bone and blood and breath, is a struggle common enough to include us all. A death that captures public attention and holds a story line compelling or intimate enough to provoke public mourning brings with it cohesion, a declaration that we are not alone in our human experience. If only in the sense that we all have the capacity to bear loss, that we all have the capacity for human attachment, that we can be bound with things invisible to the point that a severing of this invisible bond rips at our collective heart. It is as if we look around and ask, "Do you feel that? Can you feel these various things coming apart in your chest?"

Due to its bizarre circumstances, the death of Kyle Lake and his subsequent burial on All Saints' Day quickly became national news. It was extraordinarily odd to view his name running along the bottom of Headline News with the word "electrocuted" following close behind it. Kyle was not a visible public figure. He was simply the humble pastor of a small church in a fairly small Texas college town. He was the author of two modest-selling books. He was a 33-year-old husband and father of three children—one 5-year-old daughter and 3-year-old twin boys with the blondest hair you've ever seen.

Only the freakish oddity of the way he died could attract mass media attention. For a pastor to die of electrocution while standing in the Christian symbol of new life was nothing short

of paradox. And it was a public death in the most real sense, one transpiring in full view of a wife and congregation who loved him entirely. I'm certain these are the reasons it was picked up by the Associated Press and CNN and why, a few weeks later, my cab driver in Washington, D.C., asked about it when I mentioned I was from Waco.

I, however, chose to believe that the world knew what had been collectively lost that morning, and that's what the fuss was all about. When a person plays a role of such mass and significance in one's life, one assumes that the whole of creation feels the moment of his exit too, that the severing is as severe and deeply felt.

I thought for sure you were sitting in a Red Lobster somewhere crying with me.

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