

Greg Laurie Understands Giving Thanks, Even When It Feels Impossible

After a year that has been filled with sickness, violence and despair, celebrating Thanksgiving almost seems wrong.

When things are going well, it's relatively easy to give thanks. But when times are tough, as they are right now, it's hard to give thanks at all.

I've been there. Here's how I've learned to give thanks when it feels impossible:

Recognize God Is in Control

We lost our son Christopher David Laurie in a tragic car accident 12 years ago. He left behind a wife and two daughters, one who was yet to be born.

How was I supposed to be thankful to God that year?

Over time, I've come to understand that I must recognize God is in control of all circumstances surrounding my life, even the terrible ones. Such a recognition is an act of faith.

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

The idea of "good" here is not our usual definition of "good." Paul is talking about all things working to make us more like Jesus. And Jesus suffered immensely. Yes, He submitted to His Father's will, but He also cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Although it may not feel like it, God knows what is going on

in our lives. And we know from Scripture that He sorrows with us.

We can thank him for that.

Recognize God Loves You

If God loves me, my family and Christopher's family, then why did he let Christopher die?

C.S. Lewis, who lost several people he loved, also wrestled with this question. In *The Problem of Pain*, he wrote:

"The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word 'love,' and look on things as if man were the center of them. Man is not the center. God does not exist for the sake of man ... We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that, too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the Divine love may rest 'well pleased.'"

I have to trust God's love is infinitely greater than my own. Jesus, God made flesh, suffered for us out of love. He is intimately acquainted with our pain.

We can thank him for that.

Recognize God Is Wiser Than You Are

Losing a child is a horrific experience. Cathe and I never thought we would have to bury our son.

We have plumbed the depths of sorrow and have doubled over in pain from the power and reality of it more times than we can count. When we lost Christopher, we lost a part of ourselves.

If I had the choice, I would trade places with Christopher without hesitation and leave him here to love his wife, mom, brother and daughters. But that choice has not been given to

me. Another choice has—the choice of how I respond to grief.

Will I live forever under the cloud of despair? Or will I praise God, even when it hurts? Though I have lived through the former, I work at living by the latter.

God always deals with us for our eternal good when, in contrast, we are always interested in our temporary good. But sometimes what is good for us eternally is not easy for us temporarily. God makes that determination and works in our lives accordingly.

We can thank him for that.

We do not weep as those who have no hope. But we do weep. And we always will because we will always love and miss Christopher. I will never be thankful for his death—that would be lunacy. But I'm thankful I will one day rejoice with him in the presence of Jesus.

I take great comfort in the words of Jeremiah:

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed; His compassions do not fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in Him.’ ... For the Lord will not cast off forever. But though He causes grief, yet He will have compassion according to the abundance of His mercies” (Lam. 3:19-24, 31-32).

Praise is often painful. It feels unnatural to thank God when we are walking through dark valleys. But it is praise that brings us through to the other side.

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book is World Changers: How God Uses Ordinary People to Do
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