

How Jesus Wants to Lead You Through Your Heartbreaking Sorrow

White, puffy clouds graced the azure sky, with the temperature hovering in the high 70s—a perfect November day in central Florida. But the setting that had brought close friends and family together at Dr. Phillips Cemetery was anything but idyllic.

This moment was something I (Robert) never could have imagined for myself. It's one thing to attend a burial service for an acquaintance. It's another to be seated on the front row. Burying your mate.

I sat between my two daughters, holding their hands. The pastor read from a small leather notebook and then closed with a prayer of consecration. Someone in the extended family standing behind us started singing. Voices were raised in sweet harmony:

“There is no shadow of turning with Thee/ Thou changest not,
Thy compassions, they fail not/ As Thou hast been, Thou
forever wilt be.”

Bobbie had been my wife for almost 45 years. We had raised our children together, written books together, supported each other and fought together through her long illness. Now I was saying goodbye to her for the last time.

As the earth slowly swallowed her casket, a strange numbness covered me. Tears flowed freely from my daughters' eyes. Too weary to cry, I stared at the descending box until it rested firmly at the bottom of the freshly dug hole. I would now add a new title to my name: widower.

This moment was holy, and it was hard. Precious and painful. Though my family and I were determined to trust God to write the story of our lives, this was not the script we would have composed.

Death is real ... as is the grief that is always its companion. Over the years, both of us have waited and wept by the side of friends as they released a loved one—an elderly saint at the end of a race well run, a healthy young woman or man struck down in the prime of life, or a days-old infant whose life on earth had barely begun. Perhaps no grief surpasses that of a parent losing a child. Everything within cries out, “It’s not supposed to be this way.” But regardless of how expected or unexpected or what the specifics may be, the loss of a loved one is always painful.

The sovereignty of God is the foundation of everything for me now. That is what sustains. He writes the story. He is the author and the finisher of our faith. It’s literally true.

The loss of a child is always devastating, no matter how old or young the child may be. Chase and Katie Kemp’s son, Job, was 5 years old when he was diagnosed with a large, aggressive brain tumor. Over the next 135 days, this child captured the heart of his entire church family as he waged a valiant battle with this ferocious form of childhood cancer. He passed away shortly before his sixth birthday.

One Sunday morning, Job had shown up for class sporting new shoes—shoes that looked less like little-kid shoes and more like a small version of men’s boots. He proudly showed them to “Miss Jennifer” and told her that one day his feet were going to be as big as his daddy’s. The memory came to Jennifer’s mind as Chase walked to the microphone to recite Scripture in honor of his son, who everyone now knew would not grow up to be as big as his daddy.

“I was angry,” Jennifer remembered. “I was weeping—full of

grief and confusion.” And then these words came forth from this grieving dad’s mouth—each word intensely spoken and filled with deep emotion : “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Ps. 103:1, KJV).

With a booming voice and his arms open wide, Chase went on to recite all 22 verses of Psalm 103. At many points, he beat his chest with his big, strong arms as he fought through his grief to affirm what he knew to be true. Jennifer told us:

In the midst of our grief, we bless the Lord. We trust the Lord. We remember how God gave this special boy an extraordinary ability to perceive His nature and character as a 3-year-old, when he was asking questions about the Trinity and wanting me to draw it for him. We know Job knew God. And we know that Job is with God today.

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