

Joy in the Sorrow: *Helping Families as they Say Goodbye to a Loved One*

Biblical Counseling Seminar at Wheelersburg Baptist Church
Helping Sufferers Find Hope Through Biblical Counseling

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Monday evening, December 1, 2025

Introduction

I first shared these reflections with my church family the day after my mother's funeral. A brother approached me right after the service and said, "Thank you, pastor. That was very helpful. I plan to use what you've shared with my own family."

Joy in the Sorrow – How does it happen?

1. *Realize that joy is a supernatural gift.*
Galatians 5:22 ; John 15:5 & 11
2. *Realize that the experience of Jesus' joy isn't automatic. There are certain activities that promote its reality.*

"Be filled with the Spirit, *speaking* to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, *singing* and *making melody* in your heart to the Lord, *giving thanks* always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *submitting* to one another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:18-21, NKJV)."

Reflecting on Some Joy-Promoting Activities

1. Listen to God-exalting Music Together

Think about it: I've heard it said that the music of the church is take-home-theology. You can take it to the hospital too.

2. Sing Gospel-Centered Songs Together

**The goal isn't to entertain. It's to encourage by affirming truth. Here are some examples...

"Victory in Jesus"

"How Great Thou Art"

"Jesus Paid It All"

"It Is Well With My Soul"

"Amazing Grace"

3. Read God's Word Together

Here are some of the passages which encouraged our hearts.

Psalm 23

Psalm 46

Psalm 121

Psalm 131

Romans 8:18-39

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

1 Peter 1:3-10

4. Pray Together

******It's staggering to think that the Almighty God who created the heavens and earth listens to our lowly cry, but He does if we're approaching Him through His Son. See: *Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Peter 5:7*

5. Look at Family Pictures Together

6. Laugh Together

******I prefer the term *sacred* over *serious*. Losing a loved one is a *sacred* time, a time to honor God and this special person He has placed in our lives. And we do that with a variety of appropriate responses, including, at times, *laughing*.

7. Take Breaks Together

******Each time we left the hospital, we entrusted mom to the One who ordained the number of her days before He ever created the universe (Psalm 139:16).

8. Expressing Thanks Together for God's Gifts

9. Plan a Christ-exalting Memorial Service Together

Which songs to sing?

What Scriptures to read?

What pictures to use?

What people to include, and in what capacity?

10. Affirm the Gospel Together

******It's not like it appears in the movies. Death does not follow a script, at least, not one that we write.

Where to go from here?

1. Work at developing a theology of suffering.

“Pain need not destroy. It can be transformed.”

-Dr. Paul Brand & Philip Yancey, in *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants* (p. 309)

“Pain, then, is not God’s great goof. It is a gift—the gift that nobody wants.”

- Philip Yancey, in *Where Is God When It Hurts* (p. 29)

“However deep the pit, God’s love is deeper still.”

- Corrie ten Boom

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

— C.S. Lewis

“God shares His joy on His terms, and those terms call us, in some measure, to suffer as His beloved Son did while on earth... I will have all of eternity to sing praise to the God who permits what He hates in order to accomplish what He loves.”

— Joni Eareckson Tada, in *Tabletalk: Special Issue*, p. 68.

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears...He learned obedience from what he suffered.”

- Hebrews 5:7-8 (NIV)

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...who for the joy set before him endured the cross... Consider him...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

- Hebrews 12:2-3 (NIV)

2. Develop a biblical theology of saying goodbye to loved ones.

-Jacob with his sons

-Joseph

-David with his baby

-Moses – dies alone on the mountain

-Naomi – loses husband and two sons

-Ezekiel – loses his wife, told not to grieve normally (24:15-24)

-Stephen – godly men buried and mourned for him (Acts 8:2)

-Dorcas – Widows gathered and talked about her good deeds (Acts 9)

-Epaphroditus – in Philippians 2:25-30 “ill...he almost died...spared me sorrow”

-Paul in 2 Timothy 4

-Paul in Acts 20 with Ephesian elders – not a dying text, but it felt like it

3. *Become familiar with texts that help us face death in a way that pleases God.*

-Psalm 23 (“as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”)

-John 14:1-6

-Romans 8:18-29

-1 Corinthians 15:13-19, 20-28, 51-58

-1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

-2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:10

-Philippians 1:20-26

-Colossians 3:1-4

-2 Timothy 4:6-8

-Hebrews (the epistle enables us to face death with confidence; 11:39-40)

-1 Peter 1:3-9

-Jude 24-25

-Revelation 1:17-18