



# Good Grief?!

## How Wounds make Us more Whole

BY ANDREW COMISKEY



Annette wept intermittently as she lay there; she recounted an emotional scrape just a few hours old but I knew right away that the tears tapped into a deeper source, the one she had been probing in counseling related to her sexual abuse as a child.

I reminded her of my love for her and invoked Jesus' Spirit as an antidote and guide to her suffering. I did not try to fix her; her healing lay in feeling the grief of her injuries and offering them to both Jesus and her loved ones.

I have learned to go against the grain of my 'fix-it' response. I want to fix other's pain. I don't want to experience my own. But like Annette, I have learned that the key to wholeness is a willingness to accept and experience our brokenness. How else can we let Jesus bear it?

Stifling our gashes and grief causes our pain to go sideways. And can make us insufferable!

Not long ago, I endured an awful church-related meeting that changed the course of our future. There I discovered that my services were neither valued nor needed. Disoriented, I sought to steady my soul. I steeled myself emotionally and recited that 'these things happen in life...' I started to rehearse how I might downplay its truth and its impact, especially for Annette.

I drove home and immediately experienced a series of startling temptations; the first grotesquely sexual, the second chemical (I thirsted for more than a glass of wine; I wanted a baptism in Chardonnay), then anger: as I approached the house, I could see by the cars that a couple of

my kids were visiting, and I felt annoyed at their presence, a state that intensified as my dogs barked happily at my approached and I vowed never to get another once these died (which I prayed would occur immanently).

I walked in the door and responded to Annette's 'how did the meeting go?' with a wan 'fine.'

Knowing right off the suffering under my skin, she pulled me aside quietly and asked for the truth. I hesitated, fearing her emotional response but Annette has learned a thing or two over the years. She gave me space to express my gash and grief, knowing she would have her

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*'Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; the heart of fools in the house of pleasure...'*

**Ecclesiastes 7:3-4**





*“Will I still hold fast to the goodness of God in the pain? Crucifixion is always unto resurrection. In our wounds united with His, we await miracles.”*

Ph. 3:10,11

*‘I want to know Christ, and the power of His resurrection becoming like Him in His death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.’*

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turn. Her kindness coaxed the pain right out of me.

Francis Fenelon is right when he says: ‘If you deny your pain, it can overpower you and cause you harm. You must not be ashamed of releasing pain from the wound in your heart.’ So says the sage of Ecclesiastes 7: 3, 4: ‘Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; the heart of fools in the house of pleasure...’

There are times, maybe seasons, when happiness is a fraud and our only cure lies in joining our suffering with Jesus’.

St. Paul knew this. His life was a hymn to the truth that rising with Jesus depends on joining Him in everyday crucifixions: ‘I want to know Christ, and the power of His resurrection becoming like Him in His death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.’ (Phil. 3: 10, 11)

We own the injury; we wait, we weep, and we cling to the Crucified, awaiting new life. Yet we learn that the rising might take some time. His body makes all the difference here. God is not overly interested in our mystical experiences of the cross. He wants us to grow in love with others, precisely at the level where we need it.

We need the cross communally, especially in our injuries. Emotional wounds and losses are relational; the tendency of most is to try to work them out in isolation from others. Alone, we confirm the injury’s power by concluding that no-one can be trusted. How amazing the grace of our new community who becomes for sufferers a

source of consolation, and at core the cure of our fundamental wound: Love has bridged the gap in the new community!

Fenelon, again: ‘When you feel your heart sinking, be simple and frank and saying so; don’t be ashamed to make your wound known or to ask for help in your need. In this you will grow in humility and in the trust of others.’

Paul exemplifies that exhortation by expressing plainly His distress, as well as the consolation that came to Him from a brother: ‘This body of ours had no rest, we had conflicts outside of us and fears deep within. But God comforted us with the coming of Titus.’ (2Cor 7: 5, 6)

How blessed are we who have ‘Titus’: a spouse, a friend, a gifted counselor, a healing priest, straight from God’s heart to us. Together with the one or two in whom we wounded ones can behold new life, we learn to:

**1 Identify emotional injuries and losses.** We learn to listen to our hearts just as we listen to our bodies in physical distress. The Holy Spirit who searches out all things helps us here. When we recognize a gash, we call on the Lord and one of His friends. Like a slow-building storm, the wound will grow in emotional content. Heavy with grief, we await the blessed occasions when our hearts ‘burst’ and we are free to express the pain of our wounds.

**2 Cling to the cross.** The cross is our center-point in suffering. We are simply following our Master who was ‘made perfect in suffering.’ (Heb. 5:8) So we too learn to take hold of the cross as a very real anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.’ (Heb. 6: 19) I tend to focus upon a good-size cross and allow the Crucified to gather

up my assorted feelings and thoughts related to the wound. My pain has a place to go!



**HOPE**



**3 Let it rain.** I rejoice in the times when I am free to weep. The cross is magnetic here, the ‘lightning rod’ of my grief who lights up my capacity to release it well. At a recent Living Waters training, the

sweetness and trust I felt from my colleagues freed me to release a deep pocket of unexpected grief before the cross. I sobbed like a baby through the whole ministry time. Glory to God for His wonderful gift!

## Good grief



## BECAUSE A SAD FACE IS GOOD FOR THE HEART

### 4 Keep your wounds clean through forgiveness.

Forgive your 'wound-ers' a lot! Good grief necessitates an ongoing willingness to let go of the face(s) responsible for your pain. With each new wave of pain, extend a wave of grace to your beloved enemies. This alone keeps your wounds clean. Otherwise, they become encrusted with bitterness, judgment, and retaliation schemes. Don't waste your precious life on vengeance and self-vindication!

**5 Grieve in hope.** Paul exhorts us: 'I do not want you to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope.' (1Thess. 4:13) Let the light of resurrection shine on the cross you bear. You suffer now with the Crucified, but He is also risen. So shall you arise from this painful season. In time. You may need to abide with Christ in suffering a while longer than you would like. Hope frees you to bear grief patiently.

**7 Be expectant.** In my gashes and grief, I have learned to not settle for sloth: an emotional heaviness and passivity that results naturally from wounds. By grace, I choose to not accept emotional injury as a state of being, but rather as a test of faith. Will I still hold fast to the goodness of God in the pain? Here we must actively defy drama, foregoing the martyr and the victim 'self'. Crucifixion is always unto resurrection. In our wounds united with His, we await miracles.

**8 Be encouraged.** God loves you enough to entrust to you a share of His suffering. Why? That you might arise in His love, better able to love as He does. As I observe those like Annette who have submitted their wounds to Jesus, I behold an inspired tenderness and patience, a bearing with others in love based on some intuitive grasp of the burden each bears. Having suffered long with Him, they now suffer long with others.

Consider the possibility: this gash and grief is making you more like Jesus. Your wound is making you more whole. Sorrowful, we rejoice. (2 Cor. 6:10)

'We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which He has given to us.' (Rom. 5: 2-5) 🌿

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**have an inspired tenderness & patience, a bearing with others in love based on some intuitive grasp of the burden each bears. Having suffered long with Him, they now suffer long with others."**

# Choosing LIFE amid LOSS



BY JONATHAN HUNTER

FOR CLARIFICATION OF TERMS, I'D LIKE TO GET RIGHT TO WHAT I BELIEVE ARE THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPIRIT OF DEATH AND WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO COME UNDER ITS INFLUENCE.

I SEE IT AS A SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE THAT SHAPES A FATALISTIC MINDSET, SUBVERTING ONE'S PERCEPTIONS WITH DOUBT AND VELLING THE WAY ONE VIEWS LIFE ITSELF.

Resignation, impotence and insignificance are at work here—a real unholy trinity of hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness. Take your pick. There's a deadly finality about each one that creates isolationism of the soul and distance between us and God.

Wounding of any kind can produce a sense of loss or death within. What we do with them is most important. Each has to be grieved and worked through with the Lord and His community at one's own pace. Andy's lead article about his personal grief offers us a thoughtful and sensitive guide on doing just that.

Of note are the willful, voluntary choices he had to make to reject and renounce the tendency to despair. They are choices the Lord can't and won't do for us because they involve our authority in Christ to renounce that which is not of God. Inaction can be an invitation for the spirit of death to creep in.

*Embracing Life Ministries*, which I direct, has been committed for over 25 years to help Christians with life-altering conditions to overcome their grief-laden lives. We equip them to live again. They arrive at our groups with personal baggage over-stuffed with pain, exhaustion and depression from the cares of the world.

I usually like to ask them on the first night: "Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired, yet?" Initial responses vary. But predictably, it doesn't take too long before they get restless to unload their burdens. We give them ample opportunity to speak out loud what they've harbored in secret; in so doing, death's devices are exposed. A holy exchange follows of giving over to the Lord the confessed cares and pain, asking Him to fill us in return with His love and life. He never fails to come through!

Recovery from weighty grief takes energy. We have to choose to get up, everyday, to make that slow climb up and through the "valley of the shadow of death." Proverbs 15:24 states, "The pathway of life leads upwards for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave." We have to accept

the fact that if we are aiming for greater intimacy with the Lord it will be strenuous at times because we are seeking higher ground.

At a recent conference I heard a speaker say, "At every level there's a devil." Indeed, I believe that's what the Lord is forewarning us about when He said, "In this world you will know trouble." It is a reality check that we can expect new losses, more deaths and, yes, griefs to come over friends, family, jobs health and dreams.

But before we have time to consider those obstacles, He stops us short with "Take heart! I have overcome the world." (Jn.16:33) Our Lord and Savior has already anticipated *all* our troubles and has overcome them *all* at the cross! As C.S. Lewis put it:

He is first fruits, 'the pioneer of life'. He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because he has done so. (*Miracles*)

"The spirit of death is a spiritual influence

that shapes a fatalistic mindset, subverting one's perceptions with doubt and veiling the way one views life itself."


Victory...

In Deuteronomy 30, Moses addresses the Jewish people he has led for 40 years and who are about to cross over, without him, to take possession of the Promised Land. His powerful exhortation speaks to all of us, today, who are up against the challenge of helplessness, hopelessness and worthlessness emanating from the spirit of death—the “trouble” that lies between us and more life.

...I have set before you life and death, blessings and

curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and He will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Emphasis mine)

We are not to live our lives in anxious anticipation of the troubles and grief to come just

because the Lord said they would happen. We are called to resist the temptation to lie down in their company, to isolate and chill. We have countless life-changing choices before us at each and every turn. Take on *His* heart for you and overcome. Live! 

*Jonathan was on staff with Desert Stream from 1984 until 2005. He lives and directs Embracing Life in Pasadena, Ca.*

**“We are not to live our lives**  
**in anxious anticipation of troubles...**  
**and grief to come...**  
**take on HIS Heart for you**  
**and Overcome.**  
**Live!**”

*“Our Lord and Savior has already anticipated all our troubles and has overcome them all at the cross!”*



# Refusing to **Settle**, Reaching **for More**

BY DEAN & CHRYS TAL GREER

**"Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you"**

**Zechariah 9:12**



We often forget what a powerful testament to His abundant life our family is. Throughout our lives, Chrystal and I have faced trials and discouragement, hopelessness and despair. As singles we each faced seeming impossibilities for whole relationships. Given the sordid details of our lives (homosexuality, HIV, promiscuous histories to name a few), it was easy to disqualify ourselves from being eligible for the relationships God had created us for.

We both had our seasons of "settling for less" in the relationships we pursued, believing at times that "less than" was all

we were worthy of. God's grace always triumphed and brought family and friends to call us to aim higher. Our "fortress" continues to be the community of friends and family who surround us. They reminded us often of the Lord's promise: "I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11). These words continue to call us to re-align our plans with His.

Throughout our 15 years of marriage, we have learned to submit our weaknesses to God, each other and trusted friends—a discipline that continues to

invite His greater strength. As "prisoners of hope" we pursued—and continue to pursue—each other, a life of service to His glory, and the family we were created to be.

Four years ago through a series of impossible obstacles we adopted our son, Jeremiah. He is a testament of God's provision. We tried unsuccessfully to conceive for several years. Believing that God had created us for children, we finally decided on adoption. After almost two years without any signs of life, our hope began to diminish. "Who would want to give their child to us?" "Perhaps

*"We both had our seasons of "settling for less", believing at times that "less than" was all we were worthy of. God's grace always triumphed and brought family and friends to call us to aim higher."*



God's promise to us of becoming parents was meant only in the spiritual sense", "Perhaps we just heard wrong."

At our darkest hour our pastor had the entire church pray over us at the Sunday service. That afternoon we received an email telling us about a baby born 10 weeks early in Kansas City who needed a family. To make a very long story short, the following Sunday we testified of the new son the Lord had provided in answer to the prayers of the saints!

Not long ago, I (Dean) was struggling with my calling. Having discovered some major errors in my work, I began to question whether or not I was the man for the job. Adding to the weight were the pressing needs of our new family, missing our extended families in California, and financial responsibilities at home. In my brokenness I began to rationalize. I began to listen to that other voice telling me it was hopeless. I began to fantasize about other jobs, returning to California, jumping off the narrow road and joining the others on the highway of life.

Once again God called me to "return to my fortress". Our community surrounded us and encouraged me to aim higher, to not settle for less, to hope for more. I repented of my limited, self-serving thinking and in the process the Lord restored my hope!

He once again turned our mountainous obstacles into mustard seeds of faith. I am stronger now in the authority I have been given and aligned with His greater purposes for and through me.

A few weeks ago in our home group I (Chrystal) experienced the Holy Spirit speaking to me



of hope that brings forth life. We'd been studying 1 Corinthians 13, "the love chapter", looking at how it relates to our marriages and our children. "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Someone in our group told of his friend's response to the word hope, describing it as "weak". I was surprised by my strong reaction; I responded saying, "How can one say that? All the dreams that have come true for Dean and I tell of our hope in Him producing so much life, where God has made possible what is seemingly impossible!" True Hope, inspired by Him, is anything but weak.

Our hope hasn't been perfect. At times we have been con-

fronted with hopelessness but dared to stand for 'the more' being offered us. God has always used our friends and family to hope for us, to urge us onward to God's best.

My spirit leapt with such passion about the power of hope. What a testimony of strength it has been in our marriage, family and ministry. All the more as the body of Christ we need to stand with each other to bear, believe, hope and endure in love. Hope brings forth life! 🙏

*Dean is the Living Waters Coordinator for the United States. Dean has been on staff at Desert Stream for 11 years. He, Chrystal and Jeremiah live in Kansas City, Missouri*

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JER. 29:11

*"I know the plans I have  
for you declares the  
Lord, plans to prosper  
you and not to harm  
you, to give you hope  
and a future"*

# Corporate Corner



BY ANNETTE COMISKEY

**“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and**

**streams in the wasteland.” Isaiah 43:18-19**

This scripture verse was one of the first the Lord gave to Andy when He was calling us to ministry. Thirty-two years later the words ring as true today as they did in 1980. We are entering into a new season at Desert Stream.

Over the past few years, the Lord began to deepen Andy’s heart for the Latin speaking world, while calling him away from much of the international work of Living Waters. Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean and Latin speaking communities in the US are where he now focuses much of his time and energy.

At the same time, Andy felt more and more called to speak prophetically into our culture, which is readily accepting homosexuality and ‘gay marriage’.

As his wife, the change in his “international focus” was good news to my ears! Andy has trav-

elled intensively for all of our marriage (being gone several days most months). The traveling took a toll on me; though the Lord has been faithful to replenish me I am looking forward to Andy being home more.

The work of Living Waters Global is now, for the most part, in the hands of new leaders. They will continue to support and foster the growth of Living Waters around the world. This was not an easy decision and there is often sadness and grieving “what was”, even as God calls us to new areas of ministry.

Though the outworking of our relationships will look different, we remain committed in friendship and support for all our friends around the world. We feel privileged to be a part of a global healing community!

Perhaps more than any other issue facing the United States today, ‘gay marriage’ has seized both Andy’s and my heart. I truly thought I would never see the day when ‘gay marriage’ would become a threat to our society.

‘Gay marriage’ is just one of the results of the broken image in our world: along with high divorce rates, close to half of all children being born out of wedlock, and an alarming rate of people having sex before marriage—over 96%.

While we continue to provide support for all those who seek healing for sexual and relational brokenness, we believe that the legalizing of “gay marriage’ is a unique threat to our culture. We will be steadfast to strengthen our voice in the world and unswerving in deepening our prayers to the Lord to stem the tide of ‘gay marriage’.

2012  
 SPRING REPORT

**Publisher/Editor**  
 Andrew Comiskey

**Art Direction**  
 Immanuel Communications

**Desert Stream Ministries publishes the following:**  
 Newsletter (Spring and Fall)  
 Mid-Year Report (Summer)  
 Year-End Report (Winter)

**Mission Statement**

*Based on the biblical foundations of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God,*

**Desert Stream Ministries** proclaims to the world the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

*We equip the body of Christ to minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, through healing groups and leadership training for the local church.*

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**Desert Stream is Proud to Announce the Release of Our New Website:**

[www.aguasvivas.net](http://www.aguasvivas.net)

**This website is designed to highlight the work we are doing in Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and in Latin communities throughout the United States. Much of our website (desertstream.org) has been translated into Spanish. There is also information about our conferences, trainings and resources for Spanish speaking brothers and sisters.**

**Please Check it Out & Spread the Word!**