

## When A Loved One Dies

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Family Mess 2 Series

2 Samuel 15, 18

In April 1956 my favorite Christian author, CS Lewis, married Helen Joy Davidman Gresham, a divorced woman from the US, who was 16 years younger than Lewis, in a civil ceremony in Oxford, England. For CS Lewis this was merely a marriage of convenience. It allowed Mrs. Gresham and her two sons to legally remain in England, rather than return to America to an abusive, alcoholic husband and father. After the brief civil ceremony, CS Lewis hopped on a train and left for Cambridge University where he lived during the week and taught English.

Who was Helen Joy Davidman? She was born in 1915 to Eastern European Jewish parents in New York City. She was a brilliant woman, who got her Masters in English from Columbia University. She was a writer. She had flirted with the communist party during the 1930's depression and then married a fellow-communist and writer, Bill Gresham, who turned out to be an alcoholic and a womanizer.

In 1951 at the age of 36, Helen Joy Davidman, a Jewish former Communist atheist, found God. Or rather, God found her. Helen said that the Lord had stalked her like a lion. Then while she was completely unprepared:

***God crept nearer so silently that I never knew he was there. Then, all at once, he sprang.***

Having discovered faith, for the first time in her life, Helen looked for a guide. She began reading CS Lewis' writings and she started to write letters to Lewis. In the meantime, she got a divorce from her husband. And not one to be shy at all, she crossed the ocean with her two sons, to meet CS Lewis. She began to help Lewis with his writing and the mid-1950's became one of the most productive periods of Lewis' writing career.

But then Helen was going to be deported. Lewis, as an act of chivalry because he wanted to protect her and the boys, decided to marry her. But he had no intention of ever living with Helen. And he certainly was not in love.

Then something happened. A few months after this civil ceremony, Helen fell while she was answering the phone. She was rushed to the hospital and the x-rays revealed that she had broken her leg bone. But the x-rays revealed something more. Helen had cancer throughout her body. And while Lewis was visiting Helen in the hospital, his

heart melted. The thought that death would snatch Helen away transformed Lewis' feelings toward Helen and he fell in love with her. What had been a marriage of convenience was changed into a marriage of love.

Helen went into remission and she and Lewis thought that God had worked a miracle. They had a wonderful time traveling to Lewis' boyhood home in Ireland, hiking, talking, drinking wine together, and making love. But Helen's cancer returned with a vengeance.

Helen and CS Lewis were married again in a Christian ceremony in Helen's hospital room. And then, a few short years later, she died. Helen and Lewis were married exactly four years. And losing this precious woman after being a committed lifelong bachelor for nearly 58 years unleashed a flood of emotion which Lewis found himself unable to control. It was like the dam burst and this very rational, philosophically-inclined Englishman, who was always uncomfortable being driven by his emotions, suddenly found himself unable to control his emotions. He decided that the best thing for him to do as a writer was to sit down and write.

And so he wrote and wrote and wrote his most vulnerable and personal of his books titled A Grief Observed.

### **A Grief Observed by CS Lewis**

Today we're going to continue in a series I've been doing called Family Mess 2. We're going to trace the arc of one young man's life from his rise to power to his fall, and then to his death and burial. The young man's name was Absalom. He was the son of the King of Israel, King David. I've called today's talk "When A Loved One Dies." Let's pray.

As I said, Absalom was the third son of King David. And if you've been here for the series, you learned a few weeks ago that as a result of Absalom's bitter, unresolved anger towards his father, he decided to launch a campaign. It would have been a coup d'état to overthrow his father and to assume the Kingship for himself. Here is what we read in 2 Samuel 15:1-7:

### **Absalom's rise**

#### **2 Samuel 15:1-7 (NIV)**

**In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, "What town are you from?" He would answer, "Your servant is from**

**one of the tribes of Israel.” Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you.” And Absalom would add, “If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice.” Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the people of Israel.**

You know, we always think that we’re so different than everyone who has lived before us. We especially think that we are so different than people who lived thousands of years ago. So we think that the current anti-incumbency mood is something that was created in the US three years ago during the mid-term elections, or five years ago during the presidential elections, or back in the 1990’s. But it is this anti-incumbency – “Hey, I’m not a Washington insider; I’m not a politician; I hate politics; I’ve spent my entire life outside of the beltway building a business” – this anti-incumbency mood is nothing new. It is at least 3000 years old and it is seen in this Old Testament story from 900 BC.

It is always easy to find fault with someone who is currently the leader because we all do things that are wrong. We all disappoint one group or another. Let’s look at Absalom’s rise to political power. Absalom is a great politician. Look with me at 2 Samuel 15:2:

**2 Samuel 15:2 (NIV)**

**He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, “What town are you from?” He would answer, “Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.”**

Absalom was a hard worker and he exploited the political divisions that existed in the nation between the northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribe of Judah. He exploited regional and tribal differences. “Oh, you are from the north, from the tribes of Israel. Well, its no wonder that your case is not being heard from the king from the tribe of Judah.” He was a hard worker and he exploited divisions and drove a wedge into the cracks wherever the cracks were.

And like any good politician, Absalom was a great listener, and was a very empathetic; at least he pretended to listen. 2 Samuel 15:3-4:

**2 Samuel 15:3–4 (NIV)**

**Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you.” And Absalom would add, “If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice.”**

I feel your pain. What you're saying makes sense. He exploited people's frustrations with bureaucracy. They can't get to the King because he was shielded by layers of bureaucrats. And as any ambitious politician knows, the shortest route to power is the politics of resentment. Again, vv. 3-4:

**2 Samuel 15:3-4 (NIV)**

**Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you." And Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice."**

The politics of resentment. Ambitious politicians always underline and rub people's sense of being injured. An ambitious politician will always tell a group of people that they want to win over to their side, "You have been wronged. You have been injured. You deserve greater respect. You deserve a better lot in life than you have been given. You've been ripped off by someone; someone has gotten what you deserve. And this someone's power is growing and unless we stop them in their tracks, you are going to be further injured. They will take away even more of what you deserve, what's rightfully yours." The politics of resentment. You have been ripped off, my dear friends, by the people who are dependent upon the government. Or you have been ripped off, my dear friends, by the big corporations, by the welfare cheats, by the top 1%.

And according to a great new book by James Hunter titled [Change the World](#),

**Change the World by James Hunter**

Christians in America today practice the politics of resentment as much as any other group. Read the fundraising letters of Christian groups and you will find, the news media, radical feminists, big government, National Organization for Women, The American Trial Lawyers Association, the ACLU, the Criminal Rights Lobby, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Here are some quotes: The gutless politicians are taking over our country. They're not only causing harm to America, but harm to Christians. They hate people of faith. Different groups are working tirelessly. Their unfairness is only getting worse. The threat we face today is not to a foe on a foreign battlefield, but from within. You are being injured and the injury is only getting worse.

The politics of resentment practiced by ambitious politicians and special interest groups is nothing new. It is, of course, the exact opposite of what good and great leaders do. Good and great leaders do not appeal to base feelings of resentment. Instead, great and good leaders appeal to the better angels of our nature.

As our greatest President, Abraham Lincoln, said in his First Inaugural:

***We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.***

The great and good leaders don't appeal to resentment. They call us to lift up our eyes and believe together for something better. I think of Dr. King's famous "I have a dream" speech where he said:

***I have a dream that one day in the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.***

Absalom was not that kind of leader. You know, the rhetoric of resentment, the nursing of grievances and grudges, is not only practiced by politicians, we see it over and over again in church splits. By God's grace, Vineyard Columbus has never suffered a church split. But I've walked together with dear friends whose pastoral ministries and churches were split by some ambitious Absalom who got ahead by nursing the grievances of a group in the church, who believed that their voice was not being heard. It is the Absaloms who have risen up in churches throughout Christian history. They never build churches from scratch. They never start with nothing, in some far off place and build God's kingdom. Instead, they steal what other people have built. Absaloms never take the risk of faith. And where they are in disagreement, peacefully leave and start something – no. They live off the labor and hard work of what others have built.

Why would anyone give power to someone like an Absalom? Or let me put it this way, who should we trust with power?

Jesus gives us three simple tests for choosing leaders in a church. Jesus' three tests are good for choosing leaders anywhere. Look with me at Luke 16:10-12:

**Luke 16:10–12 (NIV)**

***“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?”***

Look again, at verse 10:

**Luke 16:10 (NIV)**

**“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.**

Jesus says that you should give leadership to someone who does not have a proven track record. If someone has no past track record of leading anything well, of being faithful anywhere, of doing a great faithful job with anything, you don't promote that person. What Jesus is saying is what management experts have been saying for years:

***The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.***

Here is the second test. Who should we trust with spiritual leadership? V. 11:

**Luke 16:11 (NIV)**

**So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?**

If a person has not been successful and faithful in a secular job, why would you appoint them to spiritual leadership in a church? So many folks are not well thought-of in their secular jobs. They are not viewed as hard workers. They are not viewed as reliable. They are not team players. They're not well liked. So these folks experience frustration at their secular jobs and they say, "You know what, I think God might be calling me to Christian ministry." Friend, God is certainly not calling you to Christian ministry until you have a track record of faithful, successful work in the secular realm. If you can't handle the worldly wealth, Jesus says, who will give you true riches, true spiritual leadership?

And finally, the third test, the one which specifically applies to Absalom, v. 12:

**Luke 16:12 (NIV)**

**And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?**

If you can't render loyal and faithful followership while you are under someone else's leadership, you should never be promoted to senior leadership. If you can't faithfully carry out someone else's vision, then no one should trust you to lead with your own vision. A basic test of leadership is this: have you ever been a good follower?

Absalom could not serve under his father. But rather than leave the Kingdom and start over with nothing, like every ambitious politician, he stole what was built by someone else. Let's look at Absalom's fall.

**Absalom's fall**

A civil war broke out between men who gathered themselves to Absalom and those troops who remained loyal to Absalom's father, King David. Here is what we read in 2 Samuel 18:6-9:

### **2 Samuel 18:6–9 (NIV)**

**David's army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. There Israel's troops were routed by David's men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword. Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.**

Absalom's hair got caught in an oak tree. Absalom was left dangling there in mid-air caught by his hair.

Why is this significant? Absalom's hair was his pride and glory. We saw that a few weeks ago in 2 Samuel 14:25-26:

### **2 Samuel 14:25–26 (NIV)**

**In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him. Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair once a year because it became too heavy for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard.**

What is the significance of Absalom being trapped by his hair? .

We often think that people are done in by their weaknesses like the Greek myth of Achilles. Do you know that story? Achilles as a baby was held by his heel and dipped into the River Styx where he gained the power of invulnerability over every part of his body except in his heel which was held by his mom. And it was this one weak point, his heel, that did him in because Achilles was killed by a poison arrow shot into this one vulnerable place.

We often think that's the way people are done in – by their weaknesses. And, of course, many people are. They're tripped up by their one fatal flaw. Maybe this has happened in your life. People do get tripped up by their greed, or by their addiction to fame, or alcohol, or drugs. They're tripped up by their ambition, or by their infidelity.

But I think that more people are done in by over-using and over-relying on their strengths. Like Absalom. It wasn't his weakness that did him in, it was his glorious strength, his hair that led to his downfall.

The conventional wisdom in leadership development circles is that you should discover and then capitalize on your strengths. Conventional wisdom says that no matter how hard you work on certain weaknesses, you are probably only going to make marginal progress. If you are not a numbers person, focusing upon accounting and finance is probably not going to get you very far. So management theory says don't waste too much time overcoming flaws. Instead, focus on what you do best. And then surround yourself with people who can fill out your weaknesses.

That is good advice. But there is a very recent book called Fear Your Strengths that modifies and balances this theory. Based on testing thousands and thousands of leaders over the last 25 years, the authors discovered that many leaders are taken down not by their weaknesses, but by over-emphasizing and over-relying on their strengths. So, in business maybe your strength is responsibility. You just have a really high sense of responsibility. Taken to an extreme that might mean that you can't delegate, that you're hyper-responsible, that you allow other people to be irresponsible and you just go ahead and do everyone's job.

Or maybe you are decisive. But you overuse that decisive strength and you can become over-controlling, dictatorial, and abusive.

You might be a good relationship builder; that could easily mean that you are just a schmoozer; you stand around all day talking to folks, having coffee, never really accomplishing anything.

Any strength can be a weakness.

Now, let me apply this to our relationship with God. The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:7-8:

**Philippians 3:7-8 (NIV)**

**But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ**

Let me explain to you a way to think about your relationship with God. Paul says imagine an accounting ledger. On one side of the ledger we have an asset column. Paul says the way I used to think about life and the way I used to think about my relationship with God is this: I would put in the asset column all of my strengths: my Jewish background, my religious education, my intelligence, my zeal, my hard work, my conformity to God's commandments, my rabbinic training – all the things that people used to praise me for and the things I patted myself on the back for – I put that in the asset column.

And to update this for you, you might put in the asset column your career success, your education, especially if you've graduated from college, or if you have a post-graduate degree, your looks, if you are an attractive person, your wealth, if you have money, your bank accounts, your 401K, your house, your popularity, your winning personality, your street smarts, your savvy, your ability to get along with people, the fact that you're likable, your kids, if they're successful – you normally put all of that in the asset column.

But Paul says in one shattering moment, while he was on the road to Damascus to arrest Jews who had come to believe that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, while Paul was on the road to Damascus he had a vision of the Risen Christ. And when Christ spoke to him, Paul says in that moment of conversion, it became clear to me that all the things that I used to consider to be assets, they all moved on my accounting ledger to the liability column. They all became losses. All my strengths that I used to take such pride in, I now saw as weaknesses.

This is a profound thing in terms of our relationships with God. Notice, the Apostle Paul doesn't say, "I totaled up my assets and I realized that there weren't enough and that I needed to add even more assets. I needed to work harder. I needed a better education. I needed an even more prestigious job, I needed another promotion, I needed to be even more religious, pray more, read the Bible. He says: I totaled up my assets and I moved all of my assets into the loss column. All that I am and all that I have it is all loss because it got in the way of knowing Jesus Christ.

Why did Paul say this? Why did all these assets for Paul become liabilities in terms of his relationship with God? Why did Paul's strengths become a source of his downfall, like Absalom? Two reasons. People's assets become liabilities when they dull our sense of need for God. All the things that we have in life can dull our sense that we need a relationship with Christ. Why do I need God when I'm doing so well? It is very tempting when you are doing well to worship at the altar of yourself, rather than to bow the knee to Jesus Christ.

Some years ago I had a wonderful conversation with a former pro-football quarterback. He played for several teams and told me that he was drafted ahead of Dan Marino. In fact, he was drafted #7 in the first round of the draft. He was All-World as a college quarterback and played for one of the best teams in the country. He was considered to be an absolute blue-chip prospect. He got into the pros and his career turned out to be really mediocre. He lasted for a half dozen years or so, but he never really lived up to the promise that he seemed to hold as a college quarterback. The fans booed him. He was traded, ending up being a backup quarterback, and finally being cut and drifting out of the pros.

He said this to me, this former first-round draft pick, this quarterback who experienced a stadium full of people booing him, "Rich, the best thing that ever happened to me was

for the first time in my life, I experienced failure. Before I experienced failure and got booed, I really had no sense of need for Christ at all. I was raised in a Christian family; they took me to church, but honestly, inside I had no real sense of need for Christ. Everything in my life was working so well. I was so popular and so successful, that it was only when I experienced failure, when I couldn't pull off success for myself, that I began to ask myself, 'Do I need a Savior? Do I need someone bigger than me, smarter than me, stronger than me to rescue me?'

How many of you would say the same thing about your life experience? You say, "I would never want to go through this again, this failure, this marital failure, this career failure, this illness, this academic failure, this bankruptcy, arrest or addiction, this humiliating experience – I would never want to go through this again, but it really was the best thing for me in terms of establishing in my heart my need for Christ and finally getting me honest with God. I stopped playing games with God when I fell on my face."

How many of you know that one? Can you say, along with the Apostle Paul, whatever advantages I have, those things I now count as loss. They got in the way of my relationship with God.

There is something else here. There is great temptation when you are successful in this world to believe that you are also successful with God. Not only does success dull your sense of need for Christ, but it can deceive you into believing that since everything in my life is going well, I must be rightly related to God. Since I've achieved so much by my own efforts, I'm sure I can achieve a great relationship with God, if I just try harder, if I just spend a little more effort, if I just add a few more assets to my asset column.

I say this with all affection, friends, but listen. The one thing that will absolutely slam the door on the kingdom of God in your face is relying on your strengths, your capacities, your gifts, your success to win you favor with God. Proverbs 28:26 says this:

**Proverbs 28:26 (NIV)**

**26 Those who trust in themselves are fools,  
but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.**

Here is the good news that Christians have discovered. God doesn't save you, only if you achieved enough success in life, only if you have enough assets in the asset column, only if you try harder to be a good person. The good news announced to us by Jesus Christ is this: God saves sinners.

John Owen, the great English Puritan from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, once wrote these words:

***God does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing people from death in sin to life in glory. He plans, achieves, and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. God saves sinners. He***

*saves people as he finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, unable to lift a finger to do God's will, or better their spiritual lot.*

When the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:8:

**Philippians 3:8 (NIV)**

**What is more, I consider everything a loss...**

...that word "consider" is a present tense verb. Paul says in v. 7,

**Philippians 3:7 (NIV)**

**But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.**

I weighed the tense in the past as the result of my experience, I chose to count my advantages as disadvantages. But now in the present, I have to as an ongoing daily process, day by day, remind myself day by day I need to consider, I need to choose, I need to remember that many of my advantages are really disadvantages when it comes to my relationship with Christ.

Listen, moving your assets in the liability column is not just something that is a once for all choice you made 40 years ago, or 20 years ago, or 5 years ago, or a year ago. This is a daily choice today. All my success I move into the liability column so that I can gain Christ. This is a process you never get done with. I will not today build my life on my career, or my gifts, or my intelligence, or my great character, or my obedience. Today I will not rely on whether I had a good prayer time this morning, or didn't sin last night in my typical way. I will build my life today on what Christ has done for me by dying for me on a cross. Today I choose to move all the good things in my life into the loss column so that I can gain the pearl of great price and rely entirely on Christ.

Absalom's fall; he was taken down by his strength, by his hair.

Let's talk about Absalom's death.

**Absalom's death**

We saw that Absalom was caught in a tree by his hair. David's cousin, Joab, the General of the army, doesn't listen to King David about being gentle with David's son. Instead he understands that as long as Absalom is alive, he is going to be a threat to the nation. So we read these words in 2 Samuel 18:14-15:

**2 Samuel 18:14–15 (NIV)**

**Joab said, "I'm not going to wait like this for you." So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive**

**in the oak tree. And ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.**

What was David's reaction when he heard the news of his son, Absalom's, death? Read with me 2 Samuel 18:31-33:

**2 Samuel 18:31–33 (NIV)**

**Then the Cushite arrived and said, "My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you." The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" The Cushite replied, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man." The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!"**

Death. David lost a child. Death is no respecter of age, or wealth. It robs parents of precious children, grandparents of their grandchildren. It leaves people to mourn for the rest of their lives. Death deprives wives of their husbands, and husbands of their wives. It deprives children of their mothers and fathers. Death removes from families the bread-winner, the protector, the nurturer. Death leaves people vulnerable in this hostile world.

Death takes away aging spouses after a half century of marriage. It pulls our closest companion, our friend away from our embrace. Death sometimes arrives unexpectedly, unannounced – a sudden heart attack, or an accident. And sometimes it arrives slowly, announcing its coming day after day, week after week, for years as death relentlessly assaults someone's body or mind. Death uses every weapon available. Sometimes it takes its victims en masse when whole cities are destroyed by a bomb or an earthquake. And sometimes death targets an individual like a rifle shot, selecting one person out of a crowd.

Power, beauty, wealth usually can overcome any obstacle, but not death. The greatest athletes, the health-conscious fanatics, the beautiful people, the strong, the powerful – everyone is eventually overcome by this great enemy.

And how does it feel to have a loved one die? Look again at David's reaction in 2 Samuel 18:33:

**2 Samuel 18:33 (NIV)**

**The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!"**

David says his son's name, Absalom, three times. He says, "My son..." five times.

You know, it doesn't matter if your child is good or bad, a success or failure, the death of a child rips every parent's heart out of their chests. One of the most powerful books I've ever read is Lament for a Son by Nicholas Wolterstorff.

### **Lament for a Son by Nicholas Wolterstorff**

Nicholas Wolterstorff was a professor of philosophy at Calvin College. He got the news one day that his 25-year old beloved son, Erik, was suddenly killed in a tragic mountain climbing accident. How does it feel to lose a loved one? Here is what Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote:

***There is a hole in the world now. In the place where he was, there is now just nothing. A center, like no other, of memory and hope, of knowledge and affection, which once inhabited this earth has gone. Only a gap remains. A perspective on this world unique in the world which once moved about within this world has been rubbed out. Only a void is left. There is nobody now who saw just what he saw, knows what he knew, remembers what he remembered, loves what he loved. A person, an irreplaceable person, is gone. Never again will anyone apprehend the world quite the way he did. Never again will anyone inhabit the world the way he did. Questions I have can never now get answered. The world is emptier. My son is gone. Only a hole remains, a void, a gap, never to be filled.***

What does the death of a loved one feel like? It feels like you have a hole in your heart. How does it feel to lose a loved one? Here's his meditation on his son's funeral.

***I buried myself that warm June day. It was me those gardeners lowered on squeaking straps into that hot dry hole, curious neighborhood children looking down at me, everyone stilled, winds rustling the oaks. It was me over whom we slid that heavy slab, more than I can lift. It was me on whom we shoveled dirt. It was me we left behind after reading Psalms.***

To bury a loved one is to bury a part of yourself; a piece of you is gone.

Never say to someone who has lost a loved one, "I know exactly how you feel." You don't. Even if you've lost someone similarly. You don't know exactly how someone else feels. Because the hole that's left when a loved one dies is a unique hole. The effect of the loss of one life on another life is always different. And you don't have to come up with something brilliant to say to comfort a friend, who has lost a loved one. Just tell the person that you grieve with them, that you love them, and that you are praying for them. Hug them. Cry with them. Don't say, "It's not that bad." Death is awful. And it does leave a hole.

Let me close with this.

**2 Samuel 18:33 (NIV)**

**The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”**

David’s statement of lament points ahead to Jesus Christ. I began with the story of CS Lewis losing his beloved wife, Joy, after a very brief 4-year marriage. I told you he wrote a book titled A Grief Observed detailing out his feelings in the wake of his wife’s death. In the book, he says:

***If only I could have suffered instead of her.***

When we love someone, really love someone, we want to sacrifice and substitute ourselves in their place. And this thought, “if only I could have suffered instead of her,” drove him to Christ. Here is what Lewis wrote:

***[Suffering] was allowed to One, we are told, and I find I can now believe again, that he has done vicariously whatever can be so done. He replies to our babble, “You cannot and you dare not. I could and did.”***

Lewis is saying two things here. He is saying I realize that though I loved my precious wife greatly, even my great love for my beloved Joy had its limits. As a human being, my love is always mixed with self-love. We always have limits on how far we will go to suffer for another person.

And I realized something else. I realized that God has no such limits. He completely emptied himself. He poured himself out in love for us on a cross. Christ did for us what David wished he could have done for his son, Absalom. Christ did die instead of us. He loved us enough to die in our place. Christ offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins. He was crucified on a cross to pay for our sins so that you and I could enter into a relationship with God. Let’s pray.

## When A Loved One Dies

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Rich Nathan

June 9, 2013

Family Mess 2 Series

2 Samuel 15, 18

- I. Absalom's rise
- II. Absalom's fall
- III. Absalom's death