

reveal the answer to this question. He never says anything about the fate of those who die in infancy. There's not one passage that's clear on the subject. Scripture does say that God is absolutely sovereign and absolutely good. That God is perfectly holy and just is clear from every page of God's Word. The Bible also says that God is full of mercy and kindness. Finally, God has revealed that everyone who comes into this world is guilty of Adam's sin and deserves hell. That's it. God doesn't think man needs to know any more than that, and He is always right. Trust God. Believe that whatever He decides to do is perfectly good, holy, and just. Fight the temptation to go beyond what Scripture says to find comfort. Turn your attention from the quest to answer this question and seek the comfort God does give in Scripture.

## HOW DOES SCRIPTURE SAY WE GAIN COMFORT?

When a child is lost, the pain is nearly unbearable. But it is not like a physical pain. The pain is that of lost opportunities, lost time, lost hugs, lost kisses, lost laughs, and the loss of lives shared. It is freezing cold darkness where there was once warm light. Losing a child leaves a hole in your life and makes you think you simply cannot go on. After a loss of such magnitude, how can anything ever be the same? This hole in your life is so large that no one and nothing can fill it except God. There is emotional pain in your life that only the Father of all comfort and compassion (*2 Cor 1:3*) can be of any help. But even that statement, although it is true, is abstract. The one question that is universal to those who experience great suffering is: "Why did this happen?" The quest for an answer to this question leads to comfort because it leads to God.

## GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND GOD'S CHARACTER

The question "Why did this happen?" leads the Christian to consider what is the nature of God's relationship to the

death of his child. All that happens has been determined ahead of time by our God. He has told us in Scripture that He is in control and determines everything that happens in the universe. By His powerful will He controls both the ends and the means:

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered (*Matt 10:29*).

The LORD hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil (*Pro 16:4*).

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou? (*Dan 4:34,35*).

Being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will (*Eph 1:11*).

When something as devastating as losing a child happens, you will inevitably want to blame someone: yourself, someone else, or Satan. But we live in God's universe and He is in control. If God had a desk, He would have a plaque on it that says, "The buck stops here." God wrote the script of your life and has made sure that absolutely everything that happens, including the great loss you have suffered, happens according to the script. If you want to know who to shake your fist at, Scripture gives us unchallengeable clarity that God is the one with whom you must take up your grievance.

But before you go off "half-cocked" to give God a piece of your mind, consider God's character in relation to His sovereignty. Scripture says that God is perfectly good: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (*1 John 1:5*). Although evil acts and terrible disasters happen

and God is in perfect control of these events, He can never ever be blamed for evil. Take the life of Joseph. God clearly orchestrated all the events so that Joseph would be separated from his father, sold into slavery, put in prison, and finally after many years given a position of power in Egypt under Pharaoh. Imagine the years of suffering that Joseph experienced, and the pain and loss that his father had to endure. The reason why all this was happening to them was clearly beyond their grasp for many years. Yet, when Joseph was finally able to confront his brothers who had caused so much pain in his life, he had an understanding of God's intentions in all of his suffering: "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (*Gen 50:20*). God's plan was to use Joseph to store up grain to allow many people to live during the famine and make way for the birth of the nation of Israel. For so many years neither Jacob nor Joseph could have possibly made heads or tails of why a good God would bring so much pain and suffering into their lives, but God had an amazing and good purpose from the beginning.

Consider the greatest evil ever committed: the crucifixion of Christ. This was the cold-blooded murder of the only innocent person in the history of the world. It's recorded in the pages of Scripture as an evil act that men are blamed for and an act that God Himself willed to happen:

Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed. They did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen (*Acts 4:27,28 NIV*).

It was simultaneously a crime committed by sinful men who "conspired" to do evil, and an event that was "decided beforehand" by God and caused by His "power." He is never to be blamed for evil, but He causes all things to happen.

Consider the amazing fact that the greatest evil ever to occur is also the greatest good! As we work through difficult issues and situations in life, we must remember that God is behind all of them. But, at the same time, we must remember that the God who is behind all of them is perfectly good!

If you're a believer, absolutely everything that the Father brings into your life is motivated by the Father's love for you. Even the loss of your child, in a way that we do not yet understand, is from the hand of a loving God and is for your good: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (*Rom 8:28*). If you're a believer, you are at the center of the universe. God is orchestrating absolutely everything in the universe so that every little detail of your life is tailored just for you. This means that even the loss of your child was chosen just for you from the hand of an all-wise God who loves you intensely. This does not nullify your loss or make your pain any less real. This does not give you a full answer to the question, "Why did this happen?" But it does give your loss divine purpose that is personal, loving, and all-wise.

## JOY: A COMMAND FOR LIFE

The second step to gaining comfort is to recognize that joy is a command. God commands believers to always be joyful (*1 Thess 5:16*). This is very different from a command to always be "happy." When I refer to joy I am not talking about a superficial smile or a carefree attitude. Christian joy can be accompanied by tears of sorrow. Christian joy is a satisfying mood or feeling, which motivates one to live for Christ. The source of joy is hope and trust in the goodness of God, in what He has done, is doing, and will do. If you have lost a child, there will be days when your sense of loss will be almost intolerable. But it will be accompanied

with an abiding trust in the goodness of God and His work in your loss. Your pain will be accompanied by a trust that God has good intentions in bringing this pain and sorrow into your life and will achieve a perfect and satisfying ending to it.

## HOW DO YOU GET FROM DESPAIR TO JOY?

The third step in gaining comfort from God is to begin working hard at transforming your mind. We have just learned some truths about what a Christian is, who God is, how He works, and the way to respond to your suffering. Now I want to tell you in practical terms how to get from despair to joy. If you have lost a child you are most likely in a sea of despair. You wake up each morning trapped in memories of what was or dreams of what could have been. Self-pity, withdrawal, rage, and bitterness are just some of the emotions and responses you might find rising up from within. Your responsibility is to begin to renew your mind with the truths in Scripture: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (*Rom 12:2*). You will have to actively work at replacing thoughts about how unfair your situation is with thoughts about God's perfect and good purpose being worked out in your life. You will have to put off evil thoughts of blaming yourself or others for your loss, and put on thankful thoughts that contain the truth that God in His mysterious and good purpose has brought this loss. You will need to fight the common temptations to:

- dwell on your loss and continue to cry and not fulfill your responsibilities.
- think that your situation is not fair and not deserved.
- get jealous of others who have new babies or are enjoying their own children.
- avoid being around people because they will ask you about your loss or because they will look at you with pity.

You can fight these temptations first by bringing to mind this precious promise: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (*1 Cor 10:13*). Then you must look to the needs of others. Concentrate on how you might love other people to the glory of God. When someone asks you about your loss or shows concern for you, thank him and tell him of what you are learning about God. Be honest about your struggles. But then begin to ask questions about how he is doing and try to encourage him.

Notice that all of the temptations above are temptations to give in to self-centeredness because of your pain. You fight that by first considering how Christ has shown you tremendous love by laying down His life for you, and then you begin to lay down your life, your preferences, and your comfort, for the sake of others. You will see that once you begin to pour yourself into other people, your life will begin to make sense again. You will find your way from despair to joy in Christ.

## SOME WISDOM FOR THOSE GIVING COMFORT

How can you help a friend who has lost a child? The first thing you must do for your friend is to cry with him. Put your arm around him and just be there for him. Your friend has just suffered such an unimaginable loss and is being hit with such a wave of emotions that he is overwhelmed. His life has been torn apart and he will need to be cared for as if he has just been in an accident in which he has been injured. This is not the time for a discussion about theology. That time will come. Often this person will need help with simply coping with the daily things we all have to do: cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes. Clear your schedule and be available. Sit with him. Read Scripture to him.

But there will come a point not many weeks after such a loss at which you need to become active in helping your grieving friend to actively assume the responsibility of finding comfort. Explain the theological perspective above. Be prepared to repeat yourself many times. Write down important verses for your friend to memorize and consider. When you see him giving in to the temptation to not fulfill his responsibilities, gently point this out and offer to help. When you notice that he is becoming self-centered and isolating himself, point out gently how that life-style is sinful. Encourage him to minister to others and give specific examples of how he might do this. Remind your friend of the life of Joseph and how out of such pain and sorrow God worked wonderful and surprising things. Above all, remind your friend of the cross and God's amazing love toward sinners over and over again.

## CONCLUSION

God offers rock solid comfort to you if you have lost a precious baby. It is not the comfort of knowing that your baby is in heaven. As wonderful as that would be, God offers you something better. He offers you the comfort of knowing that He is in control and that He is perfectly wise and perfectly good. He gives you good reason to have joy in your suffering. God uses suffering in your life to make you more like Jesus Christ. Finally, God gives you a new heart enabling you to embrace the comfort that God gives rather than giving way to despair. □

— by Steve Lehrer & Michael Feather

# Biblical Comfort for Grieving Parents

How can you find comfort when you lose an infant child? This is a very practical question that deserves an answer. There is nothing in Scripture that specifically addresses how to cope when you lose a child, but this does not mean God is silent. Scripture has much to say to believers about how to think about, cope with, and respond to all of the different trials and pain in life. This short essay is our attempt to mine the Scriptures for the comfort God does give believers who have lost a child in infancy.

## THE NECESSARY EQUIPMENT: THE NEW HEART

Whenever Scripture talks about the things that believers must do, it is assumed that real believers have the desire and ability to do these things. The reason for this is that God has given them the necessary equipment to do the job. Every believer receives complete forgiveness of sins and a new heart at conversion (*Heb 10:11-14*). This new heart is the work of the Holy Spirit causing them to love God more than anything else. This means that believers not only want to obey the Lord that they love, but that they have God's power enabling them to obey Him. I am not saying it will be easy. You'll have to sweat to please God with your pain and grief and it will probably be harder work than you have ever done in your life. But if you have repented and believed, then God is working in your life so powerfully that you will be able to do far more than simply cope with your pain.

## WHERE IS MY CHILD?

The first question a grieving parent might want answered is what is the eternal destination of his baby, but this will not allow a parent to gain biblical comfort. Our all-wise God has chosen not to