

Does God Really Understand the Loss of a Loved One?

Out of all the things that we humans go through, one of the hardest issues we have to face is the loss of a loved one. It is considered inherently as a hardcore experience. The felt emotion is of loss. Something and someone are no longer available. They are no longer with us, and the identity of we, or us, has been violated, broken. Done away with literally and only to be lived on by memory. What was, no longer is, and will not be again. The relationship of the other person can't be experienced no more. They are not here for conversation. They are not here for familiarity, closeness, and attachment. The loss caused by death had meaning. The relationship mattered. But does everyone's death matter to you? The honest reality is, of course not. If you lose something that you don't value, there is no sense of loss. If you lose some pocket change, typically you would shrug your shoulders and get on with life. But if you lost a roll of hundred dollar bills, a really nasty gut wrench would occur. Obviously, there was greater value of the one over the other. Even if some old family pictures were destroyed, they may not be worth much commercially, but the nostalgic value and emotional worth that they hold, could send some into a tizzy over the loss. You see, there is no sense of loss, if there is no sense of value. The greater the sense of value that something, or someone holds in the view or opinion of self and others, determines the sense of loss, when that something, or someone, is lost, or gone. Witness the sense of loss

when a President or other great public figure dies, especially if it is considered an untimely death. Something that shouldn't of happened yet. A nation mourns and remembers. That person is valued. The relationship they had with the people of a nation has been broken. When someone we value dies, there is a loss. And the more valued the relationship, the greater the sense or feel of loss. The loss of a spouse is felt much deeper than the loss of a cousin that you seen only at family reunions. What values are placed on what relationships? Not necessarily what the relationship should be, but as it really is. Let's take a look at two stories to show us some insight into the thought of, the value of relationships, as it really is. The norms tailored and tempered by reality.

The Value of a Relationship

In the book of Ruth, starting at chapter one and verses 14 through 18, it says this V14 At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother in law good-by, but Ruth clung to her. V15 "Look," said Naomi, "Your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." V16 but Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. V17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." V18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

So we see in this story that Ruth was the daughter in law to Naomi and refused to abandon that relationship, even when the death of her husband no longer kept her as daughter in law. Naomi released her to go back to her other family, and Ruth was so bonded to Naomi, that she refused to give up her relationship, except when death itself would intervene. This isn't the norm. Overwhelmingly, most daughters in laws would not trek off with their mother in laws to a foreign land

under these circumstances. But Ruth had developed an attachment to Naomi that was valued over everything else at that point. The relationship wasn't what most would consider should be, it was greater than that. So the point is, look at the sense of value, as it really is. Our other story is set in 2 Kings 11:1-3 V1 When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead; she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family. V2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah: so he was not killed. V3 He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the Lord for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.

Athaliah sought out to destroy her own family. Joash was her grandson. As the relationship should be, Athaliah would at the very least hold onto the royal seat until her grandson was old enough to take over. Mentor him along the way. Have him tutored and educated by the nation's finest to prepare him for his future, and then have him seated at an appropriate time. But alas, Grandma had other ideas. Kill everyone off, including the grandkids so that she could have the throne all to herself. Now reasonable people would have to admit, that is not the way this relationship should be, but as it really was. So there was no value placed on her relationship to her family. Actually, she was responsible for their demise. But with Athaliah, there was no sense of loss, because there was no sense of value. Since she didn't value them and the relationships, she could stand the loss. Not as it should be, but as it really was.

Death in a nutshell is separation. Death separates the soul and spirit from the physical body. That's what happens to the individual that dies. What happens relationally to us when they die, or separate, is that we are separated from continuing that relationship. And not only us, but everyone else that had some type of relationship with the person who died, or separated. And when we lose someone, or are

separated from them, people come to the funeral service, which is a type of memorial to the person, and pay their respects. Which is honoring the value, to the relationships that person had, and to give their condolences to the sense of loss, due to the separation, or death. We put up picture displays, memorabilia, give out words of honor, and gather together all those who can be there, to have a service in honor of the value of the relationship. Let's look at a relationship that had value.

A Valued Relationship

In Matt 3:17 it says this "This is my son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased." In Matt 17:5 it says, "This is my son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him" And in John 5:19-23 it says V19 Jesus gave this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself: he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. V20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. V21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life; even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. V22 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, V23 that all may honor the Son just as they honor the father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. Especially note verse 20 where it says "The Father loves the Son".

In reviewing Matt 3:17 and Matt 17:5 both say my son. The first thing to establish here is the position of belonging. My son. Someone is related to someone. There is a Father and Son relationship that God himself is recognizing and affirming. He is saying that Jesus Christ belongs to him. Just like any other Father would say of their son. Both go on to say "whom I love". This just wasn't for the ears of his Son; he was informing others also of his feelings towards his Son. The Father wasn't just pointing out to others of the relationship; he also wanted

everyone to know of his attachment. So the obvious reality is, God the Father has a Son, whom he loves. And he's not ashamed to admit it, or embarrassed to reveal that fact. He openly confesses the value of the relationship. But it doesn't end there. He still continues to add, "With him I am well pleased". It's a good thing to admit the value of relationships. In and of itself, most parents love and value their children, even if they don't get along that well. There is a bond that is there naturally. Despite whatever differences there may be between parents and their children. Yet, in looking at these statements, we find that the Father also says, "With him I am well pleased" What he is revealing is that there are no issues between them. Everything's going great. We are getting along. How many parents can say the same thing? With my child I am well pleased. Not just Ok with the direction they are taking in life. Not just tolerating the decisions they are making, but approving of them. To further the thought, it wasn't just a positive nod that was cast in his Son's direction, but he said "well pleased" And when we examine John 5:19-23, we see that the Father had involved the Son in his affairs. (v20) They are a team. There is a sense of partnership and even promotion for the son. This relationship is characterized by trust and mutual respect. (v23). Every decent parent wants a good relationship with their children. God the Father has an excellent relationship with his son, I would even say perfect. God the Father has a child, a son. There is a family connection. They are a family unit. And there is recorded life and value to this father and son relationship. And the truth is, this is the way it really was and is.

Now in answering the question, "Does God really understand what I'm going through"? One of the main issues is, does God really understand Death, the loss of a loved one? Does God really understand what it is to lose someone you love, or to watch them die? Can he identify with that kind of pain or hurt? Remember, the sense of loss is tied to the value of what was lost. We have proved the relationship and its value of God the Father and God the Son. Now let's read selections

from scripture from these verses, Matt 27:50 Gave up his spirit. Mark 15:37 Breathed his last, Luke 23:46 he breathed his last, John 19:30 bowed his head and gave up his spirit. All 4 Gospels record the death of Jesus Christ. They record his separation.

Losing a Loved One

There is no way to escape the inevitable conclusion that the Father, had just lost his son. And being omniscient, all knowing, and omnipresent, everywhere at the same time, he also seen his son die. God just lost his child. There was a death in the family. Many people suffer through the loss of a loved one. But most would agree that the most painful loss is of a child. There's unnaturalness about a child dying before its parent(s). It is a grief and hurt that some never really recover from. We can bear up from most relational losses, but the loss of a child is a separation, a death, that stay's with us longer than other losses. And so, God didn't just lose a loved one, he felt and experienced the most painful category of loss, a child. And to top it off, his son whom he loved and was well pleased with. The Father experienced this personally. He went through it himself. And it was his only son. His only child, his only begotten. God understands death, the loss of a loved one. He's been there, and done that. A Father had seen his only child die, and that Father was and is, God himself.

At this point, detractors may try to point out that since circumstances may differ, that makes the loss different. Some truthfully would claim, my child died in a vehicle accident, yours didn't. Others could truthfully say that their child died of an illness, perhaps cancer. Some children die of accidents. First off, let's lay a foundation. It's not the age of the child that makes it hurtful any more or any less. The 65 year old parents that had a 40 year old child die from a vehicle accident, cancer, etc, feels no less grief, pain, or sense of loss if they valued the relationship, than the 30 year old parents that lost a 5 year old. Some may declare that the way or the reason that

someone, in this case, a child dies, makes it more traumatic. The point of God, or anyone for that matter, experiencing loss, is not the circumstances of the death. It's not the specific fact of causation that led to the loss of a loved one, it's the principle of the heartache and pain of the loss, and that God understands what it is to lose a loved one, even and especially a child, and that he can truly empathize and bring comfort as an understanding individual who has gone through what you are going through. Not in exact circumstances perhaps, but for certain, in principle.

Now this brings up some interesting thoughts on this form of dialogue. What were the circumstances that God the Father had to endure in the issue of his Son's death?

Watching it happen

How many parents have had to watch their children treated unfairly? Their own child the victim of some type of injustice, whether at the hands of their peers in the category of bullies, or in the workplace as they may be treated unfairly, or in the court system that was supposed to have given them justice and failed. There are documented stories of war crimes committed against others. Gross mistreatment by humans against humans. And way too often, this mistreatment leads to someone's death. And typically that someone is someone's child, no matter the age. Government soldiers and or guards, beating, harassing, and victimizing their prisoners. Often with the approval of the authorities. What did God the Father witness, and what did he feel during those hours? What he felt was what any decent loving parent would feel. What he witnessed was what no parent should ever have to go through. In Matt 26:3-4, it reads V3Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas,V4 and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. In Matt 26:59-60 V59 the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence

against Jesus so that they could put him to death. V60 But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

So here we see the fact of conspiracy. And not just a conspiracy to make someone look bad in front of the boss. And not just one disgruntled coworker, or a couple of fellow workers. This wasn't a run in with the local zoning officer either. Here we have the issue of a conspiracy by a large group of authority types; religious included that plotted beyond trying to besmirch his good reputation. The plot wasn't intended to stop at giving Jesus a criminal record to handicap any potential public ambitions he may seek. It was a plot to make sure he got the death penalty. These weren't drug dealers and embezzlers, these were supposed to be the vanguards of society. The protectors of order. The leadership of a nation. And it wasn't that they were looking for juicy gossip that had some truth attached to it, or they were looking for dirt from his past to dig up. There were not any skeletons in his closet. The conspiracy included as part of its plan, the intention to lie. So now, the victimization would include a frame up. A frame up with its intentions on being the death penalty. How many people have watched their children become pawns in this type of power struggle? How many parents have seen their child taken into custody unjustly, treated inhumanly, and then insulted and mocked in a kangaroo court with a predetermined guilty sentence?

Evidence revealed in Matt 26:67-68 then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him V68 and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"

More evidence in Mark 14:64-65 Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him. Again in John 19:1-3/19:1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. V2 The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe V3 and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face.

All parents cringe when they see their child hurt. No matter if they are 3 years old and fell and scrapped their knees, or 10 years old and fell off their bike. 20 years old and banged up in a car accident. 40 years old and hurt their back at work. There are different levels of being hurt and different degrees of pain. There are also different types of pain. The emotional pain of when your child is teased at school. Taunted at the sports game. Put down at work. In these examples, the Father watched his son get spit on, slapped, punched, flogged (whipped), struck in the face, humiliated, mocked, and insulted. This is basically the prelude to even worse. Most parents would bristle at this type of mistreatment over anyone, let alone their own child. How infuriated you could become. Would not your heart bleed and cry out, stop! Stop! Enough physical abuse! Enough emotional abuse! My son is an innocent man. He has never been in trouble. His whole life was dedicated to doing well for others. Look at the life he has led. It is a life filled with healing. Devoted to loving and forgiving. He has given hope to the hopeless. Are you people insane? Who in their right mind could find fault with such a life as the one he has lived? And it's not enough that the leadership is against him, but now they turn the people against him also.

Matt 27:15-18, 20. V15 now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. V16 At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. V17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" V18 For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. V20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

Would we examine this scenario and think to ourselves, how many people in this crowd that are shouting crucify him had at some point in their lives been touched by his life. How many of them had been healed? How many of their own relatives or children had he healed

and set free? Perhaps your thoughts would say, but now they are turning against my son, and they are trading him for a notorious prisoner. What ingratitude! At this point, how many of us would be thinking or wishing that our son would have never gotten involved and done so much good for the many who are so ungrateful?. And to top it off, they aren't just rejecting his leadership, or his offer of help, they are actively promoting the death penalty for my son. But the persuasion of the conspirators is too much.

Who among the world's population have experienced being present at the cruelty done to their child? Who among humanity has witnessed their own child's travails? Some have seen their offspring shot, stabbed, beaten, mutilated. God the Father witnessed his child being tortured. Some get the news from the police by a knock on the door that their child has died. God the Father watched as the criminal justice system helped perpetuate this victimization. Others rally to the bedside of their dying child, and conduct vigils in response. God the Father witnessed his Son's deathbed on the cross. He saw the circumstances of his son's death, and deathbed. The false witness and conspiracy. The physical and emotional abuse. The turning of public opinion. God the Father watched his son get murdered. The victim of a crime and a cover up. He watched him die slowly, on a cross, bleeding in pain, an innocent man suffering through no fault of his own.

And the proverbial insult to injury, which showed up at the funeral? Where were the thousands that he had fed? Where were the thousands that he had healed and given deliverance to? Where were all the people that he had taught and blessed? Where are the crowds that thronged to hear his parables? Where is the honor due to him, and where are his closest associates, his disciples? And they traded my son for some loser named Barabbas.

It usually doesn't make obvious sense whenever we lose a loved one. Especially under tragic circumstances, such as what Jesus experienced. And our general outlook is to perceive the loss as worse if

the death is accompanied by youth, or if our loved one who passed away had no contributing factors of their own to their death. The difference could be looked at as this, in this scenario, you have our first person, a young adult, who goes out drinking, becomes extremely intoxicated, and then drives far above the speed limit, loses control of the vehicle, runs through a red light, smashes into another vehicle and dies as a consequence. In this scenario, you have our second person, a young adult who simply goes out to run a few errands and is driving sensibly, but is smashed into by the first person, and they also die as a consequence. As a society, in general, our sympathies would be more directed towards the second person because we would rightfully discern that they did nothing wrong. And since they did nothing wrong, the usual thoughts are that they didn't deserve to die. And since they didn't deserve to die, then it was unfair for them to die. How many would speak out and say that my child's death, no matter the age, wasn't fair. The Father can say that it wasn't fair for his child to die either. We would proclaim, "They shouldn't have died." Neither should have Jesus. The Father understands this kind of thought life pattern.

The If's and If Only's

There are many heart wrenching questions in these situations. There are also many type of what if's and If only's. What if the first person wouldn't have been drinking? If only our second person would have been just a little bit sooner or later in passing through? As we go over and over the circumstances again and again, we can keep repeating the same what if's and if only's, as a temporary and imaginary consolation to loss and pain. The what if's and if only's become an alternative reality escapism to help prepare us for final acceptance. And still, years after our loss, we may still indulge the if's because of what we wished had been, instead of what really is. As a coping mechanism it is, the melancholy of the if's.

The typical question that marches to the forefront in any untimely or tragic death is why? We ask why in the belief that if we only knew why, it would help us deal with the loss. The first thing in the ability to deal with something is to be able to understand it. And if we don't understand why, when we want to know why, frustration sets in. Why did this happen? Why did they die? Some phrase it, why did they have to die? We ask with the connotation that if someone died for a purpose, for a cause, that while the same hurt and pain would be present, at least there was rationale. It makes acceptance a little easier. We are looking for meaning, or in truth, answers. We ask hoping that some truth will dawn in our souls. Maybe someone will become enlightened and share with us that knowledge. Yet intuitively, most of us realize that an omniscient God knows why. Hence the end of the line questioning begins, Why God? Or more directly, and sometimes accusatorially, why did God let this happen?

Why God?

In our hurt and anger we say many things that we would never say otherwise. The reason is that in our hurt and anger we are thinking many things that we normally don't think. And that thinking leads to the speaking. We seek to appease our felt emotions somehow. Our emotions, or feelings are not pleasant and we seek remediation of those feelings to find a more tolerable level. When that tolerable level can't be achieved in our breaking point timeframes, then the release mechanism becomes expressed verbally as soul salve. However shallow, or wrong that may be. Sometimes, due to thinking that becomes abnormal in its logic, or self centered for perceived sanity checks and balances, we rationalize viewpoints that may become abnormal. If the starting point is wrong, then the ending point usually is also. One of the end results that manifest itself from the emotions of hurt and pain that can't find soul salve, is the blame game. The blame game can also find itself birthed from the alliance of the what if's and

the if onlys and the unacceptance of the reality of loss. The blame game. Someone's fault. And in some cases, there is fault. Or blame. Even if it lie in the person who died. If someone had contributing factors, it's legitimate to hold accountable. But the line of reason still moves up the ladder. The questioning has a target. Since God is omniscient, all knowing, that means he knew. And since he is omnipotent, all powerful, he could have done something about the situation. Why did God let it happen? Why didn't he do something about it? Now we have moved into the category of questioning God's integrity and goodwill.

The closer to the truth answer that we are demanding, or the closer to the truth result that we are really seeking is, why didn't God stop this from happening, or in other words, why didn't God interfere, or prevent my loved one from dying? At some point we need to ask some self examination questions about ourselves and our own motives before we can honestly ask examining questions about God.

Why am I asking God why?

In our anger and or hurt, we can find ourselves attached to the inability and refusal to deal truthfully with that anger and hurt. And the ones who can bring us comfort and healing, we refuse to let comfort and heal us if we blame them for the hurt and pain to begin with. Take notice of the husbands and wives example. When couples find themselves at odds with one another, and then the odds escalates into major conflict to the point of casting hurtful verbiage towards each other because of a hurtful heart. At this juncture, the blame game is that you hurt me and now I don't trust you, or refuse to let you, out of anger also, to bring any healing into my life because the way I see it, you are responsible for the hurt and pain being there. Now transpose this relationship issue over to God and human. We refuse to let God comfort us since we blame him for the hurt. The upfront admittance would be that God didn't cause the death, at least not actively. He

didn't make it happen as in a pro active way. God didn't cause the loss of my loved one, but since he could have prevented, it was God's inaction that caused it. Actually, the mindset more accurately is represented as; God should have prevented the death. And since he could have and should have, that God then has a responsibility in the issue. So now, what they are saying from their deduction is that God really had an obligation to stop my loved one from dying. And since he didn't respond to the obligation that I reason he has, then he's responsible for the death, and consequently my hurt and pain. Continuing in that thought pattern, the mindset of victim sets in and we feel as if in some sort of cruel cosmic way, that God has victimized our loved one that we lost, and ourselves. And since God hasn't revealed to us the why of the death so we can find some purpose or meaning to make acceptability of the reality more palatable, then we refuse to make up with him and let some sort of healing take place between us. We accept, and some embrace, the spiritual wedge that deepens and widens our faith factors. That's the examining study and observation that some do about God and the usual unfortunate effects that take place. The bottom line, he should have done something!

The 1st Question

But let's go down this road of self examination and bare bones honesty about us and the truth of the matter. So here goes the first question at the very high end of sounding extremely calloused, "What does God owe you?" That question doesn't appear with the indifferent shrug of a shoulder. It isn't asked with any condescension or derision. But it is asked with intellectual and logical honesty. Again, what does God owe you? At the risk of stone throwing, what does God owe the person who died? To take this to its end result level, what does God owe anyone? Can we be brutally honest without being brutal? These questions aren't meant to interrogate the truth out of someone living or hiding a lie. They are meant to stop a line of reason towards

someone from someone that has become unreasonable. Think about the implications of these questions and the impact of the real answer. The blatant obvious answer is that God owes no one anything. I repeat, he owes no one anything. He owes no one any justification for what he does and doesn't do. As put forth earlier, In God's omniscience (all knowing), he uses his wisdom and understanding on when to, or not to exercise his omnipotence (all power). Does God owe anyone taxes for the Earth that he created? Does God owe anyone some money that he borrowed? Does God owe anyone thanks for any favors they think they did him? God is self sufficient and existed just perfectly fine in the timeless past before he decided to create us. By the way, God can, does, and will get along without us .And remember, God is on Heaven's throne without a democracy.

Well God owes me an explanation. The response questions are, for what, and for why? Why does God owe you an explanation for the death of your loved one? Then he would owe everyone an explanation for everyone's loss. That's an awful lot of explaining to do. What justifies the arrogance of people who demand answers to something they may not even understand? Of course it is their hurt and pain and the consequent irrational reasoning that comes out of it. These self examination questions leave repercussions that can bruise the ego.

The 2nd Question:

Irrational Reasoning and Logical End Result

Our second question that promotes self examination goes like this, if God should have stopped or prevented your loss, what makes you so special? Why not prevent everyone's loss? Why doesn't God just prevent everyone's accidents? Even the ones' that are brought about by carelessness? God should just stop all injustices. And what should God do to you if you're the one that is causing the injustice? God should stop all Death's. And then what would we do with the aging population issues? God should stop all tragedies. And what constitutes

a tragedy? Should we let the people take a vote on it? And what should God do with those that plot or try to cause the tragedy? Perhaps try them for crimes against humanity? Should God intervene in all cases? What about all the people who want nothing to do with him? Does it appear to be fair that God would intervene for all, even when all are not his? Should God interfere with my freewill? Where does it end? Is it Ok if God let's me take a few drinks, but somehow stops me when I've had enough and am on the verge of becoming a danger to myself and others? What if someone is determined to lie? Should God open their mouth and have the truth blurt out? In every case? Yes honey, you really do look fat in that dress. Should God strike people with blindness that look at pornography? And how should God stop things from happening?

So many people have their own judgments of the scope of God's intervention. At some point, everyone would disagree. So who gets to make the decision of who, what, where, when, why and how, God should intervene in the affairs of men? Obviously that mindset exists in the mentality of anyone who says that God should, or should have. What they are saying is that they now possess the infinite wisdom and discernment of knowing the answers and timing and ramifications of God's interventions. So logically, it seems that mankind can now entrust God's interventions with the rationale and logic out of someone's hurt and pain. In their defense they may add, no, I'm only speaking for myself. But everyone's who experienced the loss of a loved one can make that claim. If we can admit God's infinite omniscience, and our lack thereof, then the judgments of God's interventions must remain exclusively to him. This is Faith. Be reminded though of this, God included, we all have or will experience the loss of a loved one. Everyone who wants nothing to do with him, and everyone who wants everything to do with him.

The 3rd Question

The third question observation goes like this, are we using our hurt or our loss as an excuse to walk away from God? There are those who all along have an ulterior motive or some hidden agenda that only exposes itself when an excuse of reason comes their way. The decision they make or the path they take seemingly is played out by the circumstances, but the circumstances only serve as a cover story for what they wanted to do anyway. Have you ever noticed that if something was done wrong to someone that the offense they take seems to be blown out of proportion? The secret reality is they may have been itching for a fight the whole time and the wrong becomes the offense of convenience to lash out. Either as an excuse to display behavior that otherwise wouldn't be tolerated, or as an excuse to beat on the person who ostensibly offended. We may not realize our actions and motives overtly.

Jeremiah 17:9 the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Not many can or will admit their wrong actions and motives, especially if it involves plotting. They become subdued beneath a thin veneer of unadmitted justification. We sear our conscience as it were. With God, it kind of boils down to that some folk are itching for a fight with him. They are looking for some perceived hurt or injustice to come their way, so they can use it to self justify behavior that normally wouldn't be acceptable. Too often what it really is is rebellion masquerading as hurt. Some people utilize the death of a loved one as the circumstance that they can't recover from by blaming God. And since he is at fault, there can be no reconciliation. The next step is to give God the silent treatment, and then to walk away from the relationship. Typically the person ends up in a lifestyle that is contradictory to the faith and lifestyle that was had previously. But since the lifestyle they had previously was connected to God, and the relationship they had with God now has a major disconnect, they move

away from that connecting lifestyle, into one that promotes a continued disconnect. Yet at the root of it wasn't the hurt and pain from the loss of a loved one, it was a rebellion that was waiting to happen. The death of a loved one truth be told, wasn't the straw that broke the camel's back in the sense that they just couldn't take anymore and snapped. Too often it was the opportune moment to be seized upon as an excuse to walk out the door. Yes these are hard words. Hardcore words for hardcore examinations for hardcore situations. How bad is it that someone loses a loved one? How bad is it when someone besmirches the memory of a loved one by using their loss to justify rebelling against God? So they can say they fell into or continue a lifestyle because of their hurt and pain when really they have been secretly longing to embrace that lifestyle and now find refuge in a fig leaf of an excuse. Remember God's omniscience doesn't just know what you do or have done, he also knows why you do what you do or have done. He also knows why you don't do what you don't do. Jeremiah 17:10A I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind.

Are we using our hurt and pain as an excuse to walk away from God? Even blaming God? It is a legitimate question, and one reason for why people do things. It is not a catch all reason by any means yet it is a contributing factor for people disconnecting their relationship with God. Perhaps this self examining question would provoke those affected people into coming to their senses and turn away from their disconnecting attitudes and lifestyles.

Moral Credibility

Now it is time for our fourth examining observation question, If God didn't spare himself the tragedy and heartache of separation and loss through the death of a loved one, why is he obligated to spare us?

Remember that it was and is proved that the Father not only had a son, but that the relationship was one in which the Father was well pleased. It wasn't like they were estranged or on the outs with one another. They were a close knit family unit. There was tremendous value placed on the relationship by the both of them. So when the loss occurred, there was real hurt and pain for the Father. He didn't avoid the loss, and the resultant heartache that any loving parent would experience. If someone is willing to experience something, especially to set an example, or to make a sacrifice on behalf of others, they hold a high degree of moral credibility when they have expectations that some would follow suit. If I did it, you can do it is a popular refrain held by many who have achieved, accomplished, or endured. It usually is said as encouragement or motivation. To go to college, try for the promotion, get your chemo treatments, lose weight, learn to drive, recover from the breakup, learn a trade or new life skill, and the list goes on and on as it is said and applied to every demographic. Most are motivated by obligation to achieve, accomplish and endure. For whatever their reasons are.

Some would split theological hairs and say that Jesus had to go to the cross and die. He was obligated to. The Father had no choice. Yes in the sense that if someone was going to sacrifice their life for others, he was the only one who could go and achieve, accomplish and endure. And the Father knew this. That if there was going to be a substitution for us that was acceptable, he was the only one who would be accepted, so therefore, if it was going to happen, he would have to go. But Jesus himself said that he could call on the Father and stop the whole bloody mess.

Matt 26:53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

So on the other side of this argument, we see that God exercised his free will to let it all go down in the horrific fashion it did. Why? Because God the Father and the Son knew that this was the only

real way to reconcile people back to them. So moving forward in the argument that Jesus had to go to the cross and die, the question is asked, for whom? The answer is, for you, and for me. Isn't that unfair? Why should someone have to die for you or me? Remember, God didn't bring this on himself. It's not his fault that we are going through what we are going through. It's really too bad and unfair that someone's son, or child had to die for someone else. How would you feel if your child, no matter the age, had to give up their life for others?

There are those who lose loved ones because in their line of work, in their obligation and love to duty in serving their community, country or fellow humans, they make the ultimate sacrifice. When firefighters, policeman, and various rescue personnel rush into emergency situations and put their lives at risk, or lose them, in order to save others, we rightfully recognize the heroism. When soldiers trade their lives, when a citizen or relative steps out to protect, society remembers the loss. While the loss of these examples may give the mind something to understand, it doesn't give the heart any real medicine for its hurt. If someone dies, saving or defending another so that they may live, it still doesn't take away much from the loss of the loved one who died. No matter how you cut it, I still suffered loss. The hurt and pain are still real. So God does understand what it is to lose a loved one. And he didn't spare himself from the separation. The loss of his child was unfair to him. Injustices and tragedy were the circumstances of his Son's death. Yet the Father still chose to go through with this. Why? How about John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Faithfulness

Let's revisit something about this situation, God could have stopped this, but he chose not to because Jesus Christ had to go to the cross if God was to reconcile us. So in a nutshell it goes like this: God

was showing his faithfulness to us through the death of a loved one.

His son.

God was revealing his character to the world, and you and I are included in the world. He was proving his commitment to people who didn't even know him or care about him. God was honoring his loyalty to people who hadn't been born yet. Remember, this death occurred over two thousand years ago. For God so loved the world, even when the world wasn't loving him. The Father set a unparalleled example. He was willing to endure heartache and pain by losing a loved one, in order to reach out to us. He didn't turn his back on us when he could have cut and run. God didn't use the death of a loved one as an excuse to get away from us; he used it as the means to draw closer to us. Now this brings us to a crossroads question that is also examining, since God showed his faithfulness to us through the death of a loved one, will we in turn show our faithfulness to him through the death of a loved one?

Will we when we suffer the loss of a loved one, quit blaming God, and instead use it as a time to draw close to him and show our faithfulness in those times? Admitting our hurt and pain to someone who has been there and done that, and who can speak into our souls understanding and comfort. No matter the circumstances of the loss, knowing that the Father also had to bear losing a loved one. Accepting the facts that we may not always understand why, and deciding to stay loyal and committed to God by walking in faith that he is who he says he is. God didn't call us to a walk of understanding; he called us to a walk of faith. Romans 1:17C, Galatians 3:11B, and Hab 2:4B, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Touch me from your experience about this

God has all the moral credibility against the world by asking and expecting us to remain faithful to him, when he remained faithful to us, even when it cost him his child. Those who turn away from God

when they lose a loved one are doing nothing more than being unfaithful. Instead of running away from him, we should be running towards him. I believe there is a comfort and grace which becomes magnified when we pray that God would touch us from his experience. He has already been through this. And God can bring us a word, a vision, a touch, a presence out of his limitless experience that he has felt which can overflow comfort into our sufferings. We don't always need our hurt resolved with answers; we just want to know that someone who has gone through what we are going through is there for us to lean on. And you can be assured that God has gone through what you have, and you can call on him for hope and healing. Perhaps the first prayer that some may need to make would be along the lines of, God: Help me to show the same faithfulness to you over the death of my loved one, as you showed yourself faithful to me over the death of your loved one. The second prayer that could be made as a follow up to this or any other situation we come to endure would be, God: Touch me from your experience about this.

God understands. The next time the question arises, Does God really understand Death, the loss of a loved one, the loss of my loved one, what I am going through, the answer has to be, yes.

Does God Really Understand My Death?

At this point in this book, the premise has been set. Does God really understand what I'm going through? Perhaps more specifically, has God experienced my experience, though maybe not my exact circumstances, or my particular situation? If he hasn't experienced specifics unique to me in practice, has he experienced it at least in principle? We are establishing the answer to be yes.

In the previous chapter we dealt with a subject that is a heavy hitter, as most in this book are. There is another perspective to death. Not just the loss of a loved one, but what about the loss of self? What about my own death? Does God really understand my Death? Does he understand separation? Our mortality? And to be blunt, does God really understand my dying? Does he understand what we go through along the way? For some, it's not death that concerns them as much as the dying along the way. Sooner or later we all have to face the loss of a loved one. But sooner or later, we all have to face the reality of our own death. Some of us die unexpectedly. Some of us die in our sleep. Some die after a long, arduous struggle with some type of disease. And Holy Scripture identifies the fact of our mortality. Hebrews 9:27 – "It is appointed to man once to die," and Ecclesiastes 3:2 – "A time to die"

There will come a point in time when we shall breathe our last. We can moderate our diets and avoid excess sugar, fat, cholesterol, and salt. We can exercise all of the years that we do have. We can avoid reckless lifestyles and behaviors. Have jobs, careers, and family lives that are relatively stress-free. We can have good genetics in the area of

family longevity. We can take supplements and have good health care for any afflictions that come our way. All of these things contribute to a longer lifespan. Yet the body will still age. Reflexes will slow down. Muscular strength and speed will decrease. And one day the absolute inevitable shall happen: We will die, whether we see it coming or not. In many cases death can be delayed, or perhaps we should say, we can add time onto our lives by the previously mentioned factors. And while there is some truth to that, the great reality is what everyone knows: There is a time to die.

Across the human divide are a wide range of responses to the dying that leads to death. For some, death comes unexpectedly, the sudden heart attack or brain aneurysm. How many try to avoid an untimely death though they are in some type of military war endeavor? Some are killed in various types of accidents: vehicular, boating, sports, or work. Accidents add to the column of unexpected, read that, untimely deaths. Can you prepare for your untimely death? The spiritually minded may plead the case, *Well, if you have made peace with God, then who cares when you go? You are ready.* Yes, you are ready to enter into eternity, but you may not have been quite ready to depart the here and now. Let alone the loved ones you leave behind.

Some face the reality of their death with mocking and scorn. Others shrug it off, not concerned with what comes after death. Some genuinely consider actionable consequences. Who will take care of my kids? Or my spouse? The pets? What will happen to my family? The business? These types generally do some form of preparation through living wills, and even have their last will made up for the sake of inheritance. Some go so far as to put monies in a trust to pay for funeral and burial expenses. They make provision for the inevitable. How can we face our own death? How do we face our own death? How can we help others face their own death?

There are two aspects to death, or dying: imminent and eventual. The sooner or later views. Imminent means that death is close by. At least

in the sense that it will be soon by societal standards. In a few days, a few hours or minutes. The hospice care is coming to a close, the painkillers are the only treatment left to give, and the family members are called in. If you're conscious and aware, then you definitely face it as close by, or imminent. Eventual death signifies that some time will pass by before the inevitable happens. You have years left, perhaps decades. No sense of urgency exists for the ones who think that they have time on their side. *Yes, it will happen someday. We've all got to go sometime. But it's not my time yet, so I don't care.* But for each of us, the eventual (later) does become the inevitable (sooner). What then? Whenever the inevitable happens to each of us in whatever form it does, as we reach for comfort and hope in that last timeframe, we may ask, can God relate to my dying? What experience does he have in this area?

Knowing My Dying

Let's first establish some things. Remember Emmanuel, God with us? The bottom line was that God came to Earth among us as a human being. We shall look later at his humanity. But as God the son became human, he not only was born as one of us, he could now die like one of us. This answers the question, can God die? Not as fully God which he is, but as fully human which he was. Let's look at his own testimony in Matthew 20:17-19. This passage is where Jesus talks about his own death. Take notice of the who/what/when/where/how answers this passage gives about his death. Who would be involved? Himself, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and gentiles. What was it all about? For him to be handed over to his death. Where would it happen? At Jerusalem. When would it happen? After they got there, and they were about to be on their way. How would it happen? He would be mocked and flogged (whipped) and then crucified. Also, from John 12:32-33, "When I am lifted up" and "to show the kind of death he was going to die."

Jesus was foretelling, some would say predicting, the details of his own death. Some of us do happen to know what will be the cause of our death. The terminal. Those set to be executed. Very few of us know the details of the inevitable. How would you react if you knew the details of your own death before it happened? What if you knew the answers to the questions of your death? Jesus knew it was coming and how it was going to go down. He saw it as inevitable. He saw the later become sooner. And the sooner become imminent. In other words, his life, or what remained, became a countdown.

Can anyone imagine the mind games this would play on the average human? All of us live our lives in a countdown; we just typically don't know when the counting will end. How would you live out the remainder of time if you knew the hour of your death? Especially if it was imminent. Into what kind of frenzy would it place a person's mental state? What loose ends would you try to tie up? Who would you call? Who would you spend time with? What entertainments or indulgences would you take part in? What regrets would surface? What confessions would you make? Could you or would you come to accept it with any calm and peaceful resignation? My death is a condition of life. In order for us to experience this life, we have to accept the experience of death, or the dying that goes along with it.

Acceptance can be easier for many if the situation has as its roots a long illness that hastens the process. When people are victimized by life's offerings through shortened life spans, whether the cause was genetics, an illness, or an accident, no one implies a calloused *Oh well, that's life*, but some outlooks see death as welcome relief from the torment and suffering. So when someone has what is termed "something wrong with them," those affected or observing their death may think that the dying, or dying process, was welcome.

Even though Jesus knew the timing and circumstances of his death that has to be troubling to also know while you are in good

health. How would most react to this? There's nothing wrong with me, and I'm still going to die. I haven't done anything deserving the death penalty, but I have one on me anyway. Jesus was not terminal, but his death was inevitable and imminent. Death for all of us is inevitable, but inevitability takes on both sharpness and bluntness when factored with imminence. The terminal is faced with the inevitable sooner than later, and Jesus was faced with the same principle. How did Jesus live out his life in response to the imminence of his death, and the dying along the way?

Matthew 20:17 reads, "He took the twelve disciples aside and said to them," and in John 12:3-8, in verse 7 he said that the perfume poured on him was for his burial.

It's OK to inform others, to prepare them. When you get the news, it is appropriate to share that news with those who are closest to you. He informed those who mattered. He didn't broadcast his imminent death to everyone within earshot, but was judicious about whom he told. It's OK to be open and honest. Usually we need to talk about it and come to terms with it. Having conversations about the truth of this matter brings a preparatory mindset that readies itself for the inevitable moment. Hopefully our souls are cushioned somewhat. The impact not as deleterious as otherwise would have been. All because we communicated the truth.

If we knew how we were going to die, along with the when, what anticipations or expectations would be in our minds? A smile and peacefulness? Fear and trembling preceding that moment, due not just to the timing of our death, but also the nature of the dying leading up to it? The when mixed with the how become the great emotional multipliers in coming to terms with dying and death. A long life with a so-called bad ending, or a short time left with a peaceful ending? The preferable is the long life with a peaceful ending. The dreaded is a short time left with a nasty ending. And that is what Christ was facing.

The obvious issue in death is the physical body quits working. It shuts down. But what causes that to happen? In the preferable, it's because someone has lived a long life, the body has run its course and simply wears out and slowly grinds to a halt. In too many cases, the body has gone through some type of trauma, whether long-term, cancer, emphysema, etc., or something traumatic such as a car wreck, accidents, war injuries, etc. How many newspaper articles have we read and how many people have we known who came to their end because of the infliction of short-term physical trauma that led to their imminent death? No matter the spiritual rationalization of the death of Christ, the physical reality is that he lost his life due to physical trauma. Just look at some of the information: He was hit, he was flogged/whipped, had a crown of thorns shoved on his head, and he was nailed to a cross through his hands and feet.

The Dying along the way

If there is one thing else that adds to God's understanding, it is that he knows what it is to be beaten up. Yes, Christ, being God got beaten up. God got beaten up. And God got beaten up badly. He experienced pain and hurt. Since God had a body, and that body bled, it can truthfully be said that God understands being wounded: Isaiah 53:5, "He was wounded for our transgressions." God basically suffocated and bled to death. His physical body traumatized to death. He died. God died. God personally died. He experienced it himself. His physical body ceased. It quit. This was the dying along the way that God experienced. Pretty much everyone was powerless to stop the inevitable. Who would stand up to the forces set in motion? Who could? In principle, as many are powerless to stop downward death spirals, so were the participants in this story. Some could only look on with disbelief and heartache. Mark 15:40-41 mother and women looked on. His disciples had deserted him and there were few at his

deathbed, how is it that others can't stand with you and see it through because of their own shortcomings.

How terrible that some, in this case the Pharisees, giving consent and happy he was gone.

What is it like to die alone? With no one who can help you, or where no one will help you? On the battlefield? In a car wreck in a rural area? In a nursing home? On the streets? Etc.

God understands what it is to die a traumatic death, with essentially no one to help him. With the cross as his deathbed, he understands what it is to not die in peace and comfort. As we look to Christ for our example, what example did he set in the face of the knowledge of his death? And its imminence?

In John 13:1-17, Jesus washes his disciple's feet. Two revealing facts emerge. In V2, he mentions "That the time had come for him to leave this world." Acknowledging his impending death. Another is in V15 when he states; "I set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

Living in my Dying

What positive examples can anyone emulate in the dying along the way, particularly when death is irreversibly imminent? Christ set before us a model to be followed. The story informs us that he knew his time had come. An acknowledgment and acceptance of reality. This isn't the way I want it, but it is what it is. He wasn't in denial or escapism mode. His mindset was to deal with his situation as it was. He was spending time with those who were his. Even though his time was short, he refused to withdraw and cling to it in an isolated manner. There he was, still sharing his time and applying energy and counsel into the lives of the people who mattered to him. He didn't withhold himself. He kept giving. The witness of the story is that he loved on them. We need to keep giving, sharing, experiencing, and loving.

What was he doing? Christ was living. He wasn't waiting around for death. He was living his life in spite of it. He didn't crawl in a corner. Jesus kept living! And how should we live our lives in response to the inevitable, whether sooner or later? Keep living whatever life you have left! Keep on sharing your time and energy with those who matter to you. Keep on building relationships. Don't withdraw. Love on others. Express your love, not just in words but in deeds. Jesus knew his time was short and still set an example of love for them. He still had other people's best interests in mind.

So how should we live our lives, or what's left of it, in our time of dying? To the fullest extent possible. Making the most of our situation, still creating memories, at least for others, and giving of ourselves unselfishly. This is the example of living in our dying that Christ revealed for us.

Praying in my Dying

Yet it's not the only lesson to be learned from Christ's dealing with the inevitability and the tragic circumstances of his death. In John 17:1-5, we see Jesus prays for himself, in John 17:6-19 we find he prays for those closest to him, and in John 17:20-26 he is praying for others.

Let that be the lesson in and of it: He kept praying and communicating with God. He didn't let the fact of his imminent death interfere with his prayer life. He didn't become despondent and quit talking to God. If anything, the inevitable advancing of his death prompted him to stay close to his Father. In John 17:1-5, where he is praying for himself, we see justification for considering yourself in your prayer life. There is no martyrdom to be had by never praying for yourself. It is not selfish to pray for yourself; it is self-interest to include yourself in your prayer life. You should pray for your own health, finances, marriage, character, and walk with God. The what and why of those prayers may become suspect because of motives, but

to ask God for help in any of these and other areas is not in and of itself wrong. Jesus prayed for himself. If we consider it not wrong for him, and he is our prime example, it is not wrong for us. Praying exclusively for one's self is wrong. But never praying for yourself is perhaps even more wrong.

But Jesus didn't just pray for himself, he also prayed for those closest to him. So in the final remaining living in his time of dying, he interceded for others. Still laying down his life, while his life was about to leave him. With time running out, most would become introverted. But he kept expressing love and consideration for others. Recognizing others' needs and not just his own. His perspective of life wasn't self-centered, it was expansionist. His example says, *My prayers are not going to be only about me, but will include those with me*. In reality, he wasn't stopping for himself in prayer, but had concern for others.

So many of us, when faced with the end of our time here, become preoccupied within. Yet Christ's love in what living he had left motivated the prayers for those close to him. And even with that, he didn't stop his prayer dialogue. John 17:20-26 reveals he prayed for others beyond his loved ones. How inclusive. Making intercession for others is an expression of love, and unselfish giving. The example of living in our dying in John 17 is that we should not stop praying for ourselves, those closest to us and for others. When we do this, we are ratifying that we are going to live whatever life we have left.

Being Truthful in my Dying

In Matthew 26:38 he says, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow". In v39, "May this cup be taken from me" and in v42 and v44 we find the same. The Gospels of Mark and Luke bear similar witness. How did he live his life in response to the inevitable? He was truthful, and truthful in his prayer life. And why shouldn't we be truthful in our prayer life? If God already knows, why not just up and admit it? Whatever "it" is. In response to the reality of what he was about to go

through, Christ was being open and honest. It's OK to confess we're scared, if we are. It's OK to admit that we're sorrowful and it's affecting our minds and that it can be overwhelming sometimes when the burden of reality comes crashing down. It's not disproportionate to feeling overwhelmed, when something that is overwhelming is about to happen. Let the tears flow and the heart beat faster. Get alone with God and have it out if you have to. Confess the truth; he already knows. Who in their right mind wants to go through something painful and traumatic? Jesus understood that what he was about to endure was going to cost him something.

And the most painful point of all was that he was playing a losing hand. Some of us can see how our end will come, and it's not pretty. We think, "This isn't really the way I want to go." Emotional resistance sets in. While we may resign ourselves to the moment of death, that specific point in the time of our separation, we still don't want any of the "pain of dying" along the way. Who does? No sane person. So while we may "soldier up" or "man up," putting on the brave face at some point, let's please allow ourselves those moments of strength and courage when we break down before God. Exposure and vulnerability to the one who sees and understands. Just let it happen. Christ was up front and center in saying that, on a personal note, he didn't want to go through the ordeal. "May this cup be taken from me." It wasn't just a solitary prayer, but a repeated entreaty.

Being Faithful in my Dying

Matthew 26:39 says, "Not as I will, but as you will" and v42 reiterates, "May your will be done" and other supporting scripture. How did Christ live out his last? He stayed faithful and obedient to God. How many would tragically fall apart into immorality or disbelief because they castigate the one who gives comfort and hope? So many fall down in soul dirt, getting messed up instead of cleaned up on the inside. Jesus reaffirmed his allegiance and first love. This is his

example: *I didn't want to go out like this, but Father, if you don't change this course, so be it. If this is how I am to go out, proving who I am and you are, then I shall. My preference is to avoid the process, but I won't, and I will do it faithfully. If I could have a choice, my choice would be avoidance. But there are more important things to consider than myself. And my trust in you is that my living in my dying would prove the more important things, even if I don't understand them. So let the life I have left be a witness, that I shall be faithful to you no matter what. Not as I will, but as you will. And I will entrust the proving of the more important things to you.*

Making Provision in my Dying

How did Christ live out his life in response to the inevitable? Let's look at a few more verses. Luke 22:31-32: "That your faith may not fail." John 19:26-27: "Here is your son, here is your mother." These reveal that, faced with the prospect of his departure, Jesus needed and wanted to get a few things in order. Dying along the way becomes time to tidy up our affairs. Jesus, who had been a support structure for Peter, had legitimate concerns over the disciple's faith, and reassured him. If we were going to die, would we not rightfully be concerned about those whom we have been spiritual providers for? Hopefully we could pray and leave them with a word of reaffirmation.

In Luke 22:36 Jesus gives instructions about making preparations and provisions in his absence. There is nothing unseemly about talking through the logistics of money, finances, healthcare, housing, religion, and such, as it refers to the impact that someone's death is going to have. Don't put your head in the sand and ignore the consequences of anyone's death. Each death has some type of impact. How is the family going to make it financially? What benefits may be lost and what resources are available to make up for it? Will we still go to the same church? Do we have to move? What relationships are being affected? Time needs to be taken to prioritize and deal with death as a life-

altering event. Because lives will be changed as a result. Consider “Here is your son, here is your mother.” With no welfare or social security system in that day, Jesus made family arrangements. It was at the last minute, so to speak, but John the disciple just got his household increased and Christ’s mother, Mary, gained a son to take care of her. There is everything loving and caring about planning for our deaths. Most of us should be able to create wills, living wills, purchase life insurance, and make our wishes known to any capable surviving loved ones. But many of us put off partial, if not all, death planning. And doing so typically creates burdens, or more dramatically, outright conflict. Christ set us examples of getting our house in order in anticipation of our deaths. This is not something morbid, but a mature, responsible approach to life, and death. If we really cared, we would make preparations, especially as we get closer to the inevitable in whatever way that plays out for us as individuals.

The Hope and Faith in my Dying

Let’s take a look at another way that the Lord lived his life in response to the inevitable. In the Gospel of Luke 23:43, Jesus responds to the thief on the cross who requests that he remember him when Jesus comes into his kingdom, with, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” And also in John 2:19-22 Jesus refers to his own resurrection from the dead when he says to the Pharisees, “Destroy this temple [referring to his own body] and I will raise it in three days.” In John his death was not close by. In Luke, it was moments away. Yet in both instances, his response was with a future hope. He never forgot his destiny, that of being with God. To the thief on the cross, Jesus assures him that he will be in paradise with him. He’s moving on to something better. And that’s not all. In John we see that being in paradise wasn’t enough, he was going to be reunited with his physical body. He would be resurrected. He lived whatever life he had left with a hope and faith that this life was not all there was. What

a compelling truth for us. That Christ would face death knowing that it couldn't stop those who belong to God. We need to adopt the same mindset, attitude and faith assurance. Jesus knew that his death was inevitable, but he also lived as if his afterlife and resurrection were also inevitable. So should we.

Forgiving in my Dying

Another example revealed in Luke 23:34, *Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*, is the act of making peace with those who are against us. And the reality in his situation was that they didn't make peace with him. But he prayed for his enemies, extending peace and love toward them. Whether they accepted it or not, it was theirs. It wasn't a matter that Christ had to clear his conscience, but maybe some of us do. What do we have to lose in our final moments, anyway? Forgive those who have wronged us and pray for them. That is what grace is all about, so give grace freely. Christ gave grace freely all his life, and moves us by his final moments to, at the very least, release into eternity any wrongs, bad feelings and injustices, before we are released into eternity to God. Forgive, make peace, and clear your conscience. And hopefully you don't wait until the last to do so.

The Trust in my Dying

In Luke 23:46 we hear the words *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*. The last words of Christ on Earth before his passing. What would be our last words if we had the time to think of them? Remember, the cross was Christ's deathbed. So, in reality, the words on the cross were his deathbed confessions and instructions. His last words were words of trust: *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*. When we are about to breathe our last, words of trust that speak of what's next should pass our lips. And those words should be directed toward the one who is about to receive us. Can we confidently

make this claim of faith? After everything we've been through and are going through, when it's all finally coming to a close, will we close with a confession of faith? *Father, it's all up to you now. There's nothing I can do about what's going down and about to happen, but if there was ever a time when I am completely powerless and in someone else's hands, it is now. And quite honestly and literally, it all comes down to this. At the very last, I ultimately am trusting in no one or nothing else. My spirit and my destiny I gave to you before death, and keep on giving it to you at its door. Now I can let go and let God. Follow his example.*

I Haven't Experienced this before

What is it about death that concerns us so much? We've never experienced it. When we experience things repeatedly, or at least once, we become familiar with them. Death (separation) is permanent in our minds, even though in some manner it's not really permanent. We are eternal beings in that we will always exist. It's just a matter of where and how. Will we exist eternally with God, or will we exist eternally without God? Which many define as the second death. Will we be in his hands or not?

Many times if we've never experienced something and it's a big event or of great importance, like death, then most normal reactions would be nervousness, trepidation, anxiousness, etc. Since death is separation, the concern about death is separation anxiety. *I've never experienced this separation, and it concerns me.* When Christ said on the cross in Mark 15:34, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" the traditional and accepted view is that the sins of the world had come upon Christ, and he felt removed from the Father because of it. While that is primarily the theological truth, I also believe that a contributing factor was that Christ was experiencing separation anxiety, not just because of the distance between him and God, but the death/separation that he was about to undergo. Be reminded, God

himself up to this point had never experienced death on a personal level, and it was about to happen. I don't believe it was fear, but more of *What is this going to feel like? How is this going to process?* In his humanity form, Christ could feel the limitations imposed. He may have known what was coming, but had never experienced it. Of course scripture informs by *into your hands I commit my spirit* that his separation anxiety concerns soon became outweighed by his faith and trust in God's hands post-death/separation.

So when we are faced with separation anxiety about the experience of death that we haven't gone through, let us be comforted in the truth that God has gone through it, and understands. How should we face our own death and help others to face theirs? By following the examples that Christ lived in his dying.

How to live in my Dying

Let's recap the examples of how Christ lived his life in the face of dying, as the proof has been unfolded that God really does understand my own death since he died himself. Yet do I understand how to live in my dying? While this list is in no way exhaustive, it gives us quite a bit to go on. Here's the summation: **Don't let mind games and lies affect you.** Take ownership of the situation at least as far as the truth of the matter is concerned. **Face the truth of inevitability.** Sooner or later death comes knocking at the door. Later always becomes sooner at some point. We may delay it, but we cannot prevent it. **Inform others, talk about it.** Don't bury your head in the sand and try to be a loner hero. Others have a right to know and to get prepared also. **Keep living, sharing, and loving. Keep living the life you have left!** Don't crawl up in a corner and act like it's all over. When it's over, it's over. Not any sooner. **Pray and communicate to God, involve him.** He's already been through the valley of the shadow of death, and he can certainly speak to your spirit words and feelings of experience. **Be honest and open**

about all the realities. The physical decline, the emotional burden and the spiritual struggles. **Stay faithful to God** *Well done, thou good and faithful servant.* He's been faithful to us, now is the chance to prove ourselves faithful to him. **Get things in order.** Let everything be done decently and in order, including the handling and transfer of our affairs when we're gone. **Remember your destiny and hope.** For the non-Christian, this life is the best it ever gets; for the Christian, this is the worst it ever gets. **Make peace with others and your soul.** Release any non-peace issues. Why not leave these types of things behind also? **Trust God.** *Into thy hands.* Try to make these your last words of confession. From faith to faith. This chapter was written to answer the question *Does God really understand my own death, and the dying along the way?* The response is yes, and he also set examples of how to live in our dying.