

# Hope in Pain: The Lewis Marriage

Pain and suffering through the life of  
CS Lewis (*A Grief Observed*) and Scripture.

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Over the years I have found that life frequently brings pain in varying degrees. Most often I have witnessed the pain of others. My own experiences with suffering have been short-lived. Yes, there have been the broken bones, a half dozen eye procedures and a hernia operation. At other times I have been pained as family and friends have entered seasons of pain or have concluded their season in death. For the most part those whom I have known who were suffering, suffered for a while—perhaps even for a number of years—but then it ended.

It is not possible for me to witness the sufferings of others without personal impact. Be it physical suffering, death or the tragic end of a marriage, I feel the heat of their torment.

I felt the heat of torment while sitting with family members who had lost loved ones in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Many waited for weeks with hope that eventually faded as they were led into the death notification room. There they were told the truth about their loved ones. I have been with mothers who lost infants at birth or months afterwards. The heat seems especially intense on such occasions.

In the early 1990s a new friend was diagnosed with cancer who only days before had surrendered his life to Christ. How odd it seemed that intense pain and suffering would characterize

the brief life he had remaining as a Christian. With his wife and young children he returned to his home in Johannesburg, South Africa. I traveled the two long nights to spend a couple of weeks visiting him and his extended family. As the days passed I could see him failing. I remember well my last night with him. His bones broke in the course of normal activity. He was bed-ridden and found movement difficult. Two weeks after I returned to Oklahoma, the call came that he had died. His suffering had lasted hardly five months before he could escape through death. For his family and friends the sorrow endured for some time. I felt the heat of that pain.

Another friend who was born in 1949 was injured 17 years later. She discovered that a bed and wheel chair would take turns holding her disabled body. She is paralyzed from the shoulders down; yet she has learned to bear the circumstances that have lasted more than 40 years. I know of no one who has endured pain and its misery like her. She has experienced much of what the scriptures teach about the value of pain.

These are just samples of what I have observed over the last 35 years. During the same time I have also spent a considerable amount of time examining the Old and New Testaments regarding their attitude toward pain and suffering.

What I have discovered is that the Scriptures breathe pain and suffering. They are fundamental to the core theme of God's plan of redemption. Scripture declares the great value of suffering. Those who are looking to escape it will not find the Scriptures helpful.

Basically, pain and suffering are messages that something is wrong. Yet, by nature, they point to what is right. In the first three chapters of Genesis we are told of a world that existed free of pain. After God finished with the acts of creation, He pronounced it "good." When the day ended after He created Adam and Eve, He added that it was all "very good." This was the zenith of God's creation! As magnificent as the world and its universe is, it all pales in comparison to man, who is made in the image of God. God did not abandon His relationship with Adam and Eve after creation. He pursued them even when they rebelled.

As a means of demonstrating Adam's and Eve's relationship with Himself, God instituted the gift of marriage. Marriage throughout the Scriptures is the picture used to illustrate the relationship between God and His people. When we refer to marriage we refer to the relationship between God and His bride. It is well defined in Genesis 2 and Matthew 19.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."  
Genesis 2:24

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are

no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

(Matthew 19:4-6)

By design marriage is the ultimate picture of oneness and intimacy on this side of heaven.

Adam and Eve entered into their work as ranchers without the normal problems that plague us today. Problems as we know them did not exist. Their relationships with God and each other sang. There was no tension as we understand and experience it. Yet after both Eve and Adam had traded their trust and obedience to God for rebellion, life changed. They no longer found themselves acceptable. They could not handle their nakedness. It was very uncomfortable. They did not enjoy their relationship with God as they had in the past; they were afraid of Him. And they blamed each other for the rebellion.

You will remember well the consequence God promised them for their actions. In short, life would be not just painful, but very painful. It would ultimately end with death. Death to a true marriage is true suffering.

When death takes place within a marriage like that between C.S. Lewis and his wife, Joy Davidman, it is most raw. Lewis' work, "A Grief Observed," illustrates what God was talking about when he spoke to Adam and Eve after rebellion. Lewis knew the depth of the sting of death.

He was 57 and Joy 41, at the time suffering with bone cancer, when they married in the hospital. She lived longer than expected. They were given four years before she passed away. In order to properly understand his grief we need to learn of his marriage as he

reflected upon it in his sadness. What had he lost in her death?

### **“Her Person”**

“For a good wife contains so many persons in herself. What was H. not to me? She was my daughter and my mother, my pupil and my teacher, my subject and my sovereign; and always, holding all these in solution, my trusty comrade, friend, shipmate, fellow-soldier. My mistress; but at the same time all that any man friend (and I have good ones) has ever been to me. Perhaps more. If we had never fallen in love we should have none the less been always together, and created a scandal ...

Solomon calls his bride Sister. Could a woman be a complete wife unless, for a moment, in one particular mood, a man felt almost inclined to call her brother?

‘It was too perfect to last,’ so I am tempted to say of our marriage.”  
(See page 47, 48, 49)

### **“What marriage did for him ...”**

“One thing, however, marriage has done for me. I can never again believe that religion is manufactured out of unconscious, starved desires and is a substitute for sex. For those few years H. and I feasted on love, every mode of it—solemn and merry, romantic and realistic, sometimes as dramatic as a thunderstorm, sometimes as comfortable and unemphatic as putting on your soft slippers. No cranny of heart or body remained unsatisfied. If God were a substitute for love we ought to have lost all interest in Him. Who’d bother about substitutes when he has the real thing

itself? But that isn’t what happens. We both knew we wanted something besides one another—quite a different kind of something, a quite different kind of want. You might as well say that when lovers have one another they will never want to read, or eat—or breathe.”  
(See page 7, 8)

This is in no way an exhaustive treatment of their marriage. It is a sample—a sample that reveals the healthy intimacy at the foundation of their relationship. People long for it today. Does our culture dictate shallow lives and relationships? Do we relate to others, even within the family, like we consume food at McDonald’s?

Lewis uses a multitude of relationships that are to be had, and at times enjoyed, to describe his marriage. The depth of his loss was great.

He also spoke of what the relationship had done for him. Within those many aspects of relationship he experienced love. He “feasted on love.” She was able to give to him in her days of dying more than he had experienced in a life time: a love that filled his emotions and, at the same time, was rational. It was serious and fun. It was physical and spiritual. It made him terribly uncomfortable and very much at ease.

The apostle Paul speaks of marriage as a “mystery” in his letter to the Ephesians. Lewis, and I am sure his wife Joy, did as well. It is for us a sensual picture of our relationship with our groom, Christ. The depth of love He has for us is beyond our ability to understand. Yet we have a sense of what it means to be embraced by the warmth of His grace and mercy. His gospel affords us this privilege. Lewis knew that in marriage as well. Marriage is a

great gift. When it is over, it is a great loss. How then do we deal with such pain? The Scriptures respond in a number of ways.

## **Weeping before God**

All people weep, but not necessarily before the Lord. Our tendency is to push on and make the most of our troubles. It is important that we are still in our pain before God. In our time of sorrow we are not to think that God will belittle us. Christ wept with his cheerless friends after Lazarus had died. It is good that we weep before out Lord. Cry out to Him in times of trouble. This is what the children of Israel did in Babylon.

“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.” (Psalm 137:1)

The church will hold prayer services at times for different events and occasions. Perhaps we should hold weeping services? Are we not to mourn with those who mourn?  
(Romans 12)

## **God hears us weep**

Does the knowledge that someone is really listening to you make any difference? It means a great deal to know that someone cares in time of trouble, even if he or she can do nothing but listen. God does more than listen, but he does hear us. When grieving or hurting you are not interested in advice at the time. You want to know that you are being heard. It is a sign that someone cares.

The book of Lamentations is a record of what God has heard. It is a

memorial of the events and the activity of the servant of God, Jeremiah. God is not distant from his people, ever. He never leaves nor forsakes them. You weep in the presence of a great God who is compassionate and comforting.

In Exodus 2 we are told of the groaning and crying out to God by the Israelites while in Egyptian slavery. This took place over the course of many years. Yet God did hear their groaning and weeping.

“During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.

God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them”.  
(Exodus 2:23-25)

The psalmist says,  
“Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.”  
(Psalm 5)

“You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry”  
(Psalm 10:17)

## **Hope in time of weeping**

“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.

I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.'

The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;

it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

(Lamentations 3:19-24)

I am not sure I know how God always comforts. Yet I know that in time there is healing. Healing comes faster for some than others. In certain cases he uses certain people to bring the healing. Often if not always His Word is key to helping us in our understanding of what is taking place. Most of the time we may not know for sure. We only know of his love and purposes for our lives.

We do know that our Savior Christ went through hell to bring us His grace and mercy. He is truly a God who comforts.

### *-Reflections -*

What means do you use to address the various degrees of suffering in your life?

Do we deserve to suffer?

What irritates you when confronted with pain?

How does the gospel speak to suffering in the world and to the individual?