
September 2017

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Recommended Citation

Clemons, Cat (2017) "Good Grief!," *The Idea of an Essay*. Vol. 4 , Article 20.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay/vol4/iss1/20

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Good Grief!

Cat Clemons

Grief has a way of grabbing the attention, chiseling at every other aspect of life until nothing seems as important as that grief. Important issues melt away as pain drills for the center of every situation. Is grief important in the journey of life? While grief is natural, certainly, what lessons can be gleaned? In a Christian's life, there are many counterintuitive situations which have the unique ability to produce fruit. In the same way, grief holds an unexpected present for Christians. In a grieving C.S. Lewis' journal, *A Grief Observed*, Logos, Pathos, and Ethos work together to successfully convey the idea that there is no sanctification without grief.

The process of grief must include the realization that the loved one no longer exists in the way that they did on earth. While it is tempting to set up a shrine in the mind to someone who is dead, it should not happen. C. S. Lewis appeals to Logos when he states, "But don't come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect you do not understand" (Lewis 25). Here he is referring to the argument of his friends and acquaintances and even family who were saying that H., Lewis' late wife, was safe and much happier in her heavenly home. Lewis declares this brings little comfort to the grieving. He declares the idea that he ought to rejoice in his wife's new situation for the sake of religion implausible and discouraging. Religion cannot comfort him because he cannot see what it has done to H.. He believes that she is living in another world, another time, another place. However, he does not know what he believes is true; his lament echoes that she will never again be what she was on earth. In her book *The Truth About Grief*, Ruth Davis Konigsburg discusses how people radically change their mindset about their loved one and how they themselves change through the process of grieving. They must create a new normal for themselves (Konigsburg 170-175). Lewis knows especially that "the specific maternal happiness must be written off. Never, in any place or time, will she have a son on her knees, or bathe him, or tell him a story, or plan for his future,

or see her grandchild” (Lewis 26-27). Lewis claims that he doesn’t know how H. exists anymore and his warrant is the great mystery of death. The data supplied is that no one truly knows for sure what is on the other side of death or the capacity in which souls exist; indisputable evidence. He despairs over this because it is so hard for him to acknowledge that his beloved wife doesn’t exist in the same way that he knew her. In this Logos argument, Lewis must accept his wife’s new identity. A mark of sanctification is letting go of everything save God.

Grief unveils new, mortal human beings who suddenly wonder what kind of other horrors life holds for them once a loved one is ripped away. Ethos is introduced almost from the very beginning of Lewis’ writing. The raw levels of emotion that he uses in describing his very first reactions to the death of H. are painfully accurate to anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one. He describes the experience as being “concussed” (Lewis 3), a feeling that is too accurate for those who cannot quite grasp what they know is true. He uses the feelings and thoughts that race through a victim’s mind as data to warrant his claim of truly knowing and understanding what it means to lose a loved one. In this way, his audience can believe him to be credible when he uses something they have potentially felt themselves. Charles M. Sell writes in his book *Transitions Through Adult Life*, “Since grief is normal, it is not an enemy to be attacked with Scripture verses and sweet-sounding phrases. Grief is a tunnel to go through, not a fly over.” (Sell 179) *A Grief Observed* is credible in its portrayal of not knowing how to properly grieve with one another. Sell says exactly what Lewis alluded to: his grief is being attacked by well-meaning friends, as though it is unnatural. Sell acknowledges a concept that most would not want recognized: grief will never fully be worked through. It lingers. It is uncomfortable for those who know the griever, but it is harder for the bereaved to know their own pain as well as the discomfort caused to those around them. The process of sanctification also involves, as Lewis points out, a journey. Grief is not the enemy, but a natural part of life. Grief employs the use of long-suffering, perseverance, and the process of a journey. In many ways, grief is a parallel and a prerequisite to sanctification.

Seeking answers from God is important to how Believers view grief. Employed in Lewis' own raw grief, pathos finds its place. In his apt words, "If she was in God's hands all the time, I have seen what they did to her here. Do they suddenly become gentler to us the moment we are out of the body? And if so, why?" (Lewis 27) In his unexplainable pain, Lewis allows himself something that many Christians perceive as the ultimate sin: he questions God. Yet as much as this is frowned upon in Christian society, Lewis connects with his audience in a feeling that many have been shared when experiencing loss. Did God make a mistake? How could He choose to wound so deeply? Lewis continues: "If God's goodness is inconsistent with hurting us, then either God is not good or there is no God: for in the only life we know He hurts us beyond our worst fears and beyond all we can imagine" (Lewis 27-28). Lewis expresses accurately how a grieving mind might perceive all sorts of "godly comfort" and how each of them ultimately fall short. The biggest point that Lewis appears to drive at is the helplessness of the bereaved and those who surround them. Lewis even dares to ask the hard question: How is God good when He has allowed something clearly bad to happen? In his book *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis writes, "IF God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both. This is the problem of pain, in its simplest form" (Lewis 12). Here, Lewis uses the claim that if God is good, He shouldn't hurt us. His warrant for his claim is that no one who claims to hold His child in the palm of His hand would intentionally inflict that person who is trusting Him. Just as a relationship between two people has little chance of growing if there is absolutely no conflict, so a Christian's trust and growth in Christ will not progress unless there are periods of time where everything is falling apart. There must be conflict and adversity to have sanctification. Otherwise, there would be no need for sanctification itself.

Ultimately, Lewis draws in Logos, Pathos, and Ethos to convey a compelling argument that many do not want to consider. Sanctification, not a simple process, uses uncomfortable methods to get attention. Acknowledging who God is before everyone and everything else is essential in sanctification. How would we walk closer if we were not driven closer by the storms of life? The idea that

God is not good is false even when grief makes it seem plausible. Yet, questioning God is not wrong. These three new concepts, brought into light by Lewis, are difficult to accept. But once they are acknowledged, the process of sanctification is made clearer to the blind mourner. When we cannot see what is good through the pain of loss, God is the ultimate good. Only His path can lead us to sanctification. And if His path brings us through the valley of grief, He is still desirable above all else. Good grief! Is this true?

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