

Weekly Devotion August 31, 2020

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### “The Blessings of Disappointment”

Shelby was headed for her Senior year of college. She was a hardcore softball player for her college. At that time the college she attended had a huge softball tournament in Orlando Florida which everyone on the team looked forward to. Of course, to go on the trip required each member of the team to raise money to be able to go. This was a trip that Shelby looked forward to every year and always worked hard to raise what she needed long before the deadline. It was not only a chance to play other college teams around the country but also as everyone knows, Orlando had some fun things to do as well.

But something happened that no one saw coming. On a surprise call from her parents she received news that Shelby will not be able to finish her senior year at that college. A combination of problems had been building and finally collapsed. Her father had just gotten laid off after a string of health problems had finally prevented him from being able to do his job. And a letter had come that Shelby had allowed her grades to slip a little too far for her scholarship to be carried over to the second semester of her senior year. Shelby was devastated in disappointment.

Shelby tried at least to salvage her softball trip to Orlando since her monies had been raised and sent in. But since she was no longer going to be an enrolled student the coach couldn't convince the powers that be to allow it. So, Shelby went home and eventually finished her senior year at a more affordable college closer to home. It was not the senior year that she had imagined for herself or had planned for.

Disappointment comes in many forms and my guess is that as you watch this today you yourself have felt as Shelby did. Whether it be something simple as a new car that breaks down, or something bigger like a divorce disappointment hurts. But having this experience as we do may actually make us strong enough and wise enough to be kind of person that can help someone like Shelby. Disappointment can lead to a kind of mourning process but it also can lead to blessings. Consider the scene in John 11.

Starting with verse 28: <sup>28</sup> After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” <sup>29</sup> When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

<sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

<sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Lazarus has been in the tomb four days. Jesus arrives to a very disappointed group of people, especially Lazarus' sisters. When Mary runs out to Jesus she falls at his feet acknowledging Jesus as Lord but also in wonder says, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died." One can easily hear the sting in that statement. Of course, we know from previous verses what Jesus had planned to do. Even so it should not be lost on us how Jesus handled the moment.

Jesus listened to both Martha and Mary and did not try to fix them. Jesus accepted the disappointment and met them there in that disappointment. Jesus also treated each of the sisters appropriately. With Martha who was practical, "the strong one", Jesus does a little teaching and review. <sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

<sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

On the other hand Mary, is much more emotionally driven, and reflective. Jesus approaches her a little differently. Jesus effectively has a good cry with Mary. Jesus listens to her and then just joins her tears for a moment. Jesus doesn't try to fix Mary either. He was deeply moved and loved her. And in Jesus being there He also reminded others of His love for Lazarus and that Jesus felt their heartbreak. And before raising Lazarus Jesus renewed their faith in Jesus being the Messiah and the source of eternal life.

When we meet someone who has been struck with disappointment consider this same path. We may not be able to remove someone's disappointment or the things that have brought that disappointment to bear. The Lord doesn't ask us to do that nor should we try to. We are not called to fix people but to love them.

Start by showing up and be present. When Lenard Nimoy died William Shatner decided not to attend his funeral saying he had contractual engagements to fulfill. At the time I thought to be a pretty lame excuse for a guy that Shatner had known and worked with for decades; and who as Captain Kirk and Spock were portrayed as the best of friends. Comforting people works best when we are truly and actually present. When we hurt we remember a friend's presence much more than we remember what they said.

Be quick to listen and be available. Sometimes this means we learn to be uncomfortable. "Lord if you had only been here..." or "Why is this happening?" may not be a question you have an answer for but still feel we should say something. Just listen and be present anyway. Let them express themselves. The best way for disappointment to lose its power over us is tell our story over and over again because as we do, we are processing it, accepting it, and allowing ourselves to mourn. Giving someone the same opportunity to process shrinks the emotional hold that disappointment may carry.

Encourage trust in the Lord. Pray. Talk with the Lord. Turn to the Lord. But then remember the Lord allows us to feel disappointment. Don't misunderstand what I am saying. Sometimes what happens has nothing to do with a specific plan as it did with Lazarus. Sometimes bad things happen. Jesus does not try to protect our feelings. The women were allowed to feel the full sense of loss. What followed were a deep sense of awe after Lazarus had been raised. That is a plan that John 11 spells out. But not everything is so clear or certain. That's okay too. But we trust in the Lord anyway to turn what hurts into something good. And what is good may not be fully understood. But disappointment has a way of making us a little tougher to beat and a little more aware of our need for Jesus. When it comes to the death of a dream, or a marriage,

or a brokenness that we were not expecting or something else facing disappointment with faith in Christ is certainly more productive than disappointment without Jesus. Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not only your own understanding sometimes is the best course to take. In the end walking with the Lord is course that offers grace in corners of our life that we didn't know we had need of it. "Do you believe this?" Jesus asks Martha. Are you ready to believe in the midst of disappointment? Faith finds a way.

People find out who they are in disappointment. But we also find out who are friends are when disappointment strikes. The blessings of disappointment are found with those who cry with us, listen to us, hold on to us, and help us process. Most of all in Jesus we find a friend who in ways only God can define can turn our hurts into a much deeper faith by His grace. You may be just the person who makes that possible as the Lord works through you.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods  
John 3:30