

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, September 2, 2020. Thank you so much for tuning in and taking this time out of your day to focus on God and focus on your faith.

I am realizing that many of us are lately experiencing grief. Many of us are grieving the death of a loved one, and that is hard on a lot of different levels. And many of us are also grieving things not quite as tangible as that. We are grieving the loss of traditions, the way we used to do things. We are grieving the loss of sports seasons, big life events, musical groups and performances, much of the joy that comes with the beginning of the school year, being able to see our beloved people in person, and these types of grieving are also really hard because they're not tangible. It's hard sometimes that our grieving a sense of normalcy is actually grief because we normally just reserve that word when there is a death involved.

But grief is a messy and tricky thing. Many of us are familiar with the five stages of grief - denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and acceptance. And those stages come in a circle - some days we are deeply sad about our loss, in the depression phase, and some days our grief comes out like anger, at why things can't change, be back to normal, etc. And there are some days too when we accept that life is very different now than it was 6 months ago. Doesn't mean the grieving is over, or that you're "over it" - everyone grieves differently, and it shows up in our minds, and spirits, and bodies in ways that may even surprise us.

So for today's devotion, I want to give you some space to check in with your grief. We are all grieving in some way or another, even if it's grieving expectations for what life at this point would be or look like. Because we are all experiencing loss on a communal, larger, even worldwide level, that takes time to realize just how much it impacts us. And it does impact us, in lots of different ways.

But we need not fear that look inward, or that tending to our grief. God holds us through all our grief, all our stages and difficulties and hardships, God holds us with grace and mercy and tenderness. God is still working in our world, and even in our grief, even if that feels overwhelming sometimes. The Holy Spirit activates gifts and insights in every single one of us, and I pray that we will all take comfort in her holy presence. I pray that the steadfastness, the unendingness of God's love comforts you, empowers you to continue on, and gives you peace in this weird season.

As we check in with our grief, I'm going to read a psalm that is very familiar to many of us, as it's commonly read in funeral services. It's a trust psalm that provides such beautiful images of God's comforting shepherding and leading, guiding and gentle, powerful grace. This is Psalm 23. I invite you to sit back and be nourished and comforted by these holy words:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

3 he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Let us pray:

Lord God, you hold us in deep love as we grieve, and for your holy gift of love and presence, we give you thanks. As we grieve, help us to give grace to ourselves, as we learn to live in new ways. Help us to give grace to the people around us, also learning, and help us to hold them in tender care and compassion, as you have first held us. For all who are starting a new school year, for all who work in healthcare, for all who are called to the efforts of justice and peace in our country, we pray for your healing power, your holy safety, and deep love of neighbors. Hold us, dear God, hold us tenderly and always in your steadfast love. Thank you for the promises of this love, made human for us in Christ Jesus, and thank you for the hope of new life that He brings. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Go in peace dear friends. Amen.