



Episode 2-22: Helping the Grieving

Resources:

Books

[God's Healing for Life's Losses - Robert Kellemen](#)

[Home: How Heaven and the New Earth Satisfy Our Deepest Longings - Elyse Fitzpatrick](#)

[Dark Clouds Deep Mercy - Mark Vroegop](#)

[Hearing Jesus Speak Into Your Sorrow - Nancy Guthrie](#)

[Gentle and Lowly - Dane Ortlund](#)

[Why? Trusting God When You Don't Understand - Anne Graham Lotz](#)

[Heaven - Randy Alcorn](#)

Websites:

[GreifShare](#)

[Restoration](#)

Documents:

[List of Bible Passages](#)

Transcript:

Janet: I don't just need to feel better. I need the truth. And ultimately that will make me better.

Alexandra: I just want to make it as totally simple and no brainer as possible for ladies to see that the Bible is really applicable to their everyday life.

Jocelyn: When they understand theology, the application flows out of it quickly with joy.

Janet: It is a journey, but even the journey itself is joyful when I'm doing it, holding the hand of my savior and trusting him all along the way. This is the joyful journey podcast, a podcast to inspire and equip women to passionately pursue beautiful biblical truth on their journey as women of God. When you choose truth, you're choosing joy.

Janet: Okay, welcome back. This is Janet here once again with Jocelyn.

Jocelyn: Hey friends.

Janet: And I have a special guest that we've asked to share with us today. Her name is Gail McGinty, and I'm gonna let Gail tell you a little bit more about who she is, but I'm gonna tell you that she's really special to me because she has recently become family. Not just because we're sisters in Christ, but we also have children who married each other. Right, Gail?

Gail: Yes, absolutely. Yay.



Janet: And that's very fun. So, my son married her daughter so now we've gotten to know each other on an even more special level. But believe it or not, that's not why I asked you to come today.

Gail: I'm not that special.

Janet: You are, but for even more reasons than that. Gail and her husband are part of a really important ministry at our church that I think is practical, but a subject that most of us wish we didn't need to deal with, but all of us are gonna face. And that's the area of suffering. So Gail, could you talk to us just a little bit more about what your background is and how you and Dale came to be involved in ministering to people who are grieving?

Gail: Sure. My husband and I, Dale, we lead the GriefShare program at Faith Church here in Lafayette. GriefShare is an international faith-based grief recovery program with thousands of groups meeting around the world. We've been involved with GriefShare in a support role since 2017, and then as leaders. I also serve as a certified biblical counselor at Faith Church's west side campus in West Lafayette, Indiana for the last five years. I'm really thankful for these opportunities to be involved in the lives of people who are suffering. It's really a privilege to hear their stories and get to see how God is working in their lives. So how I became involved in ministering to people who are grieving has really been a lifelong journey. I didn't learn about suffering and grief from books. I pretty much learned about it in real life. So on the GriefShare videos, the statement is made most people see life as pretty smooth with a few bumps along the way, but the truth is life is very bumpy with a few smooth places in between.

Janet: Oh, so true.

Jocelyn: True.

Gail: And that's pretty descriptive of my life and for a lot of people.

Janet: Right.

Gail: So I'm not special. I would say if your life hasn't had a bump, I'm super happy for you, but you might wanna brace yourself. I think that the bumps in my life from the very beginning were accomplishing a lot of things. They made me turn to God. They taught me about life in a broken world, and they gave me some hard earned tools that later I would use to come alongside other people who are grieving.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Gail: So my bump started as a child. I learned as kids in children's hospitals, all across the world, know that life includes suffering and even death. Thankfully, my mom told me about God and His sovereignty and His love. She said things like, this isn't a mistake. God's with you in this



suffering and He's entrusted it to you. He's faithful, and He's gonna use it for good. She pointed me to the comfort of God by sharing scriptures like Luke 12:6-7, this says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you're worth more than many sparrows". So those early lessons would come in handy later in life as it got more bumpy. There were years of enduring childlessness.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: Infertility, more hospitals, more surgeries. Those hard years culminated though, in a beautiful baby boy born to us through adoption. So yay! Now we can get on with life.

Janet: We're done with grieving, right?

Gail: Right, right we thought, then seven years later, a surprise, a daughter was born. Well, we're gonna celebrate now until they told us she would need heart surgery before her first birthday, and by the way, watch her closely because she could go into heart failure at any time.

Janet: Oh, wow.

Gail: So at 10 months after wrestling with God, we handed her over to a world famous heart surgeon at the same children's hospital that I'd been in some 30 years earlier.

Jocelyn: Wow.

Gail: And we got through it. We thought our suffering cup had been fulfilled and now it's smooth sailing. Surprise again! Seven years later, another much more complicated pregnancy. Endangering my life and the baby's life. Months of wondering if I would be leaving my two children motherless because of the pregnancy.

Jocelyn: Wow.

Gail: More risky medical procedures, and then Noelle Colette was born. We later learned that her name means to be born with victory.

Jocelyn: Oh, that's so cool.

Janet: Oh wow.

Gail: A true miracle according to the doctors. Okay. Now we can get on with our life, but two years later, after scary period of unemployment and a job change, we left our family and friends and everything familiar to move across country to Indiana from California. So home sickness, adjustment, hard.



Janet: Yes.

Gail: Then there was the day I learned both my daughter who was serving in Africa had contracted malaria and my husband was diagnosed with cancer on this same day.

Jocelyn: Oh my goodness.

Gail: Thankfully, they both responded to treatment and recovered. So that taught me a lot of stuff. Each season of suffering at my life has carried its own journey of grief to work through. But when I think back on those days, I remember that yes, the pain and worry were hard, but God was faithful and His help was very real. I could literally write a book of stories about His specific help in specific times. Psalm 46:1 is true when it says, "God is our refuge and strength".

Janet: Yes.

Gail: "An ever-present help in trouble". So life is bumpy and we can expect it. Jesus was not kidding when He said in this world you'll have tribulations and my story's not unique. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation, or you could put in the word trial, there has overtaken you that's not common to man". So suffering can bring a lot of stuff up in your mind. It can tempt you. It can set your mind on fear.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: Anxiety and a commitment to control life that disables you from trusting God and loving others. It can tempt you to have a fatalistic mindset that can make you a slave to self-pity and depression.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: Or it can open your eyes to the hurting world around you and your ears to the invitation of God to be part of His redemption plan. Our own suffering can be the training ground that equips us for that very mission. So in all my past trials, I'd worked through the hard questions. Like why God?

Janet: Yes.

Gail: How long is this gonna last? Are you really in control? And are you gonna help me? So in each instance because I got to see good things come out of each of those situations, I guess I thought I had God figured out.

Janet: We trust Him and he lets the end come out good.

Gail: Exactly. Exactly. I suffer for a period of time and then God makes everything nice.



Jocelyn: Finally it's done.

Gail: Yes. So you might say I put God in a box. God, you may do amazing things, but only within these certain boundaries.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: But then the unfathomable happened my mom and dad died in an unthinkable tragedy that seemed completely senseless. Robert Kellman in his book, *God's Healing for Life's Losses* says, "When tragedy occurs, we enter a crisis of faith. We either move toward God or away from God." The first thought almost immediately after I got the news of what happened to my mom and dad was a question from God to me. I heard Him saying to my heart, do you trust me? Can you trust me even with this? I think that's the core question that arises for everyone who loses a loved one in death.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: Can I still trust the God who allowed or even ordained this? I knew I had a choice in those moments and then many moments following. I could trust God as He's been revealed to me in the Bible, or I could trust my own ideas of what's right. I could live without hope or I could believe in a loving God, who's ultimately sovereign even over this kind of event. Will I only trust Him if I can understand Him or will I live in distrust or even unbelief because I don't understand what He's doing? Does He have to operate within my opinions of what is ultimately good or am I gonna believe in His transcendence and omniscience? Is God supposed to serve my agenda or am I here to serve His? That's a lot of questions.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: But we're all asking them in those moments.

Jocelyn: Yeah, and we're all thinking that. We're all wondering those kinds of questions.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: Yes, absolutely. And this goes way back to ancient times. The story of Job in the Bible tells us that after he lost nearly everything short of his own life, he had a lot of questions for God.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: About 20 chapters worth. I counted. Then God questioned Job. He began with where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? And He continued those questions for four chapters. Job didn't have a lot to say after that, but he did say this surely, I spoke of things I did not understand.



Janet: Yeah.

Gail: Things too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You. Job let go of the God he thought he knew and he gained the God who is.

Janet: Oh, that's beautiful.

Gail: When suffering and death become a reality in your life, it's an opportunity to get a clear view of who God is and who you are. It invites a response, and I learned that in that response, there can be found a path to peace on the journey of grief. So after the tragic death of my mom and dad, Dale and I decided to come to Faith's counseling ministry for grief counseling. We wanted to set aside a time and a place so that we could process what had happened.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: With someone who was objective. So after 13 weeks of meeting, the counselor suggested that I take the basic counseling training course at Faith. I prayed about it. And I told God that if that was what He had for me, that He would have to bring it about because I was not gonna force it to happen. Just days before the deadline to sign up, Pastor Green, the head of the program, just happened to come up to us at church. My husband told him of my interest in the program and he said, consider her signed up. I was sitting right there and I hadn't said a word. When things get hard, I remember that day. So after I finished the class, one day outta the blue I got a call from Pastor Green. He asked if I would consider going through the certification process and joining Faith's counseling team. Well, I almost fell off my chair. Again, not something I pursued, but I had been feeling drawn toward that. So we said yes to the opportunity that God was placing before us, and I thought, okay, God looks like you're getting ready to redeem some stuff. So, then during my supervised counseling training with Amy Baker, she asked me to take a grieving counselee to the new GriefShare group.

Jocelyn: Oh, that's interesting.

Gail: Yeah, so I did, and I never left. I'd been through two other grief support groups before that were very helpful, but they didn't go quite far enough. I was impressed with the biblical content of the GriefShare program. Then the leaders decided to retire and they asked Dale and I to facilitate the program. I'm super grateful. God lets us serve in the grief ministry and the counseling ministry. It's been a huge blessing to my life. It's a privilege to help counselees apply God's word to the challenges in their lives and to point grieving people to the greatest hope and purpose available.

Janet: You know, one of the things I love about you sharing all that is another response could have been, I've been through so much grief, the last thing I wanna do is every week, go sit in a room of people grieving. I will remember my grief. I won't be able to just say I've moved on, but



instead, what it did was give you a desire to serve and it gave you a compassion. And really I've watched you and Dale in that room, such a connection and hope for people who are grieving and I love how God has redeemed it in that way.

Jocelyn: And you know, the comfort that God has given you and you wanna make sure that's available for other people.

Janet: Right.

Gail: Absolutely, yes.

Jocelyn: So what makes you passionate about serving those who are grieving?

Gail: Well, we live in a hurting world. The weight of suffering in sin on his planet is so immeasurable. Romans 8:22 tells us that the whole creation's been groaning as in the pains of childbirth, right up to this present time.

Janet: Yep.

Gail: And even though these are ancient words and every generation has their stories about suffering. I can't think of a better verse to describe our world in these current times. Covid's taken a huge toll on our world.

Janet: Yep.

Gail: All of us have been touched directly or indirectly by the death of someone from Covid.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: Not to mention the domino effect in so many areas of their lives from the pandemic. Now we're just starting to catch our breath after Covid or at this part of Covid.

Janet: Trying.

Gail: Yeah. Now we have the war in Ukraine.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: We only have to turn on the TV to see images of suffering death right in our world.

Janet: Oh, overwhelming.

Gail: And so the world is reeling from the atrocities, but Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good". So God sees all the suffering and the sin on this planet. He not only sees it, but He came to experience it for Himself so that



He could help us through the suffering and rescue us for eternity. I love Hebrews 2: 14-15. It says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity. So that by His death, He might destroy him who holds the power of death. That is the devil and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death". This is the hope and comfort of the world, and God's given us the mission to share it. So 2 Corinthians that you were referring to before Jocelyn says, that God is the father of compassion and the God of all comfort. And He comforts us in all our trouble so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. So in God's plan, nothing is wasted. God redeems suffering for life-giving purposes. I've been comforted by God in my grief, and now I can be a conduit of comfort to others.

Janet: I love that.

Gail: So that's why I'm passionate. I also wanna share hope with people whose lives have been radically changed by the loss of a loved one. Even though life may be very different now, God's purposes for you have not changed. The expression of it may have changed, but the purpose of it has not changed.

Jocelyn: That's such a comforting truth.

Janet: Right.

Gail: Yeah.

Jocelyn: He's like you can't mess up God's plan. God's plan is gonna outlast anything that we have to experience.

Gail: That's right. And as a Christian, our purpose is to glorify God in our life, whatever the circumstances might be that we find ourselves in. So to glorify God simply means to make Him known by the way you live your life in whatever you're doing.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: That gives me something to get up for every single morning. So after the loss of my parents, I came across Psalm 84: 5-7 these verses spoke to my heart of what God's purpose for my life could be after experiencing such a horrible tragedy. How would I view my life with this now being part of my story? So I decided these would be my life verses. It says, "Blessed are those whose strength is in You, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Baca, which means weeping, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength; till each appears before God in Zion".

Jocelyn: That's beautiful.



Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: Wow. That is so beautiful.

Janet: And it's very eternally focused, which is where the hope is.

Gail: Absolutely.

Jocelyn: And I appreciate the point of describing our life as a pilgrimage, through valleys of weeping. That is so accurate.

Janet: Right.

Gail: Yeah because I knew that if I was gonna be strong, it would have to be God's strength.

Janet: Right.

Gail: And so I set my heart on pilgrimage because life's taught me this world's not my home. My home's in heaven where things are as they should be. When I pass through the valley of Baca or weeping, what's my response gonna be? Well, like this verse says, I can make it a place of springs where other fellow sufferers can get a drink of hope. The last sentence reminds me that more trials are coming. And when they do, God has promised strength and grace to walk through it at the time I need it, and not before.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: He's promised to help me go from strength to strength until I see Him face to face, and He wipes all those tears away for good. And that's why I'm passionate.

Janet: I love that. So let's just try to be a little bit practical then because I'm imagining that we have people listening who are saying that is beautiful. What are some practical steps that a friend can take so that they can be ready to really comfort somebody who's going through a crisis?

Gail: Well, when a crisis happens, it's unexpected. So people are unprepared even if the death is expected.

Janet: Right.

Gail: Something drastic has happened. Something monumental has changed. Someone who was here is gone.

Janet: Yeah.



Gail: It's shocking. It creates upheaval. So since by nature, a crisis is not something you can completely be ready for. Being someone who can help has to be someone who's already been cultivating a servant's heart. And we can do that by growing in our knowledge of the greatest servant whoever lived, Jesus Christ.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: He displayed the greatest act of empathy that ever existed. He entered our suffering to be with us in it and do something about it. The Bible tells us that as a Christian, the goal is to grow in Christ likeness. Right?

Jocelyn: Right.

Gail: His life was characterized by loving and glorifying God and loving the lost and the suffering. The Bible tells us that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. But loving others as yourself doesn't come naturally. So we have to be intentional to obey that command. So we can determine to grow in Christ-like empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and participate in the feelings of another. It's not just feeling sorry for them. It's feeling their pain. It's a heart that can weep with those who weep because you're suffering with that person.

Janet: You know, I think that's a lot harder. Many of us are more comfortable saying, I know you're hurting and I'll physically do something for you. But to say, I know you're hurting and I'm willing to enter into that with you.

Jocelyn: I'm gonna hurt with you. Yeah.

Janet: Yeah. Is exactly right. It's exactly what Jesus calls us to do, and we're gonna need His help to do it. Because most of us are resistant to that.

Gail: Yes.

Janet: Naturally.

Gail: Naturally, yes. And then Paul says that the body of Christ, the church, that if one part suffers every part suffers with it.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: So we've been shown a model of how we should, what we should do. empathize with someone if you don't understand what they're going through.

Janet: Right.



Gail: So seek to understand by first inquiring and listening carefully. We naturally wanna jump into conversations and apply what we think we already know about it. But if we wanna understand, we need to hear the whole matter first. Proverbs 18:13 says, he who answers before listening, that's his folly, his shame.

Janet: Right.

Gail: And then verse 15 says the heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, the ears of the wise seek it out. So preparing to help someone in crisis is not just things to do. It's things to be. Loving and caring for others because you've become a loving and caring Christ-like person. Also, the willingness to sacrifice time, schedule, and resources is part of being ready to help a friend in crisis. And that's a mindset. Everything I have belongs to God. He's given to me so that I can share when others are in need.

Jocelyn: So what are some helpful things you can do with, or for someone who's grieving?

Gail: Well, first I would say be sensitive and then I'd say be humble. Discern your level of involvement. Realize that grief is very personal and individual. So be aware of, and know the relationship that you have with the person in order to determine what's appropriate. Are they a private person or an open person? Have you been close friends for years or are they just an acquaintance? What other help are they receiving? Do they have family support? Their season of life might determine what types of help they might need. Do they need help with their kids? Or are they an empty nester or a single person, and they need companionship? One very helpful thing you can do for a person who's grieving is what we call the ministry of presence. So it's just being there to support them. That's huge knowing that they're not all alone. Maybe you're behind the scenes, keeping the dishes washed. Maybe you're answering the door and helping with the visitors, and maybe you're just sitting with your friend, but you're there.

Janet: Right.

Gail: The Jewish community has an amazing custom it's called sitting shiva. Have you ever heard of it?

Janet: I have not.

Gail: It's the grieving person will sit on a low stool or box for seven days while people come to sit with them in their grief. I think it's beautiful.

Janet: Wow.

Gail: It's an example of what a grieving person needs, at the beginning, especially. This is exactly what Job's friends did for him at first, when they came, after he lost everything and before they started talking. Job 2:11-13 tells this story. When Job's three friends heard about all the troubles



that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him. They began to weep aloud and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him because they saw how great his suffering was. On the day I lost my mom and dad, my then pastor and his wife came straight to my house after a long drive from a trip they were returning from. And they literally sat on the floor with me as I held my parents' pictures in my arms and cried and just let out the thoughts and the grief. They didn't offer advice or tried to fix it. They just cried and they hurt with us for a long time. I'll never forget that.

Janet: Wow.

Gail: It was amazingly comforting. Listening is such an important gift because the first response many people have at the news of a death of a loved one is no, this cannot be true.

Janet: Right.

Gail: And it can take six to nine months for some people to really accept and internalize the loss.

Jocelyn: Wow.

Gail: That's why in GreifShare we teach that the first goal of grief is acceptance. Our brains are designed to learn by repetition. So rehearsing the event of the loss helps people internalize and assimilate the reality of it into their lives. Dr. H. Norm Wright says that after the person has told their story a thousand times, they finally begin to believe it's true.

Jocelyn: Oh my goodness.

Janet: Wow.

Jocelyn: Oh, my word.

Gail: I'm sure that's an exaggeration, but you get the message, right?

Jocelyn: Yeah. I get it.

Gail: Some people go over and over the events of the death in their mind, trying to understand. I know I did. These people need to tell their story. It's how they process it by getting it outside of themselves, and for them it's a huge relief. So try to listen well and listen long. Let your friend express her emotions. That's a part of listening and it's the third goal of grief that we learn at GriefShare. Don't feel you need to judge her or shut her down. God can handle the truth.

Janet: Yes.



Gail: Bottled up emotions don't disappear. They build then they implode or explode. So venting can actually resolve into lamenting as God softens the heart. And we see that in examples in the Bible. There might be anger. That's a common initial response. Don't be surprised at that. Be patient. If she can't resolve it, encourage your friend to seek biblical counseling. Being angry can evolve into becoming an angry person, and that can become a stronghold that can get a person stuck in grief and prevent them from living out their God-given purpose. Help your friend turn to God. That's the second goal of grief that we learn about in GriefShare. Pray for her and pray with her. Lament is so helpful. It's a biblical type of prayer in grief. It's a coming to God and honesty about how you're really doing, what your true feelings are, including your doubts and your fears. There's no pretense. There's no pretending. Just true thoughts about the pain you're in and your honest questions. So lament is turning to God, bringing your complaint, asking God for His help, and then expressing your desire to trust Him by reminding yourself who He is. But the problem is your friend might be in too much pain to do that and to pray that way, so a beautiful thing to do is to pray a lament for her, or with her. This is a way to join her in her grief and model an example of lament. So it might sound something like, Father in heaven, my friend and I have come to you and we don't understand this. We're hurting. We need your help. This doesn't seem right, but we know you're the one with the answers. So would you please come and help us? We're trying to trust you.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: That's really helpful to hear you explain that.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: So we could do it for her then maybe she can do it for herself later. may have physical needs as well. She may need to be held while she cries. Maybe just an arm around her, depending on your relationship with her. Maybe a hug. That was done for me by my dear mother-in-law the morning or the evening we got to California. We flew in, I was really dreading first seeing the family and she was waiting for us on the front porch.

Jocelyn: Oh.

Gail: And I walked up on the front porch and she just took me in her arms and she held me for a good 10 minutes. And it was, I'll just never forget that.

Janet: Right.

Gail: She said, Gail, I know I'll never be able to replace your mom, but I want you to know that I'm here for you and I support you. And I just, I truly will never forget it. So they may need something like that. Then there are basic physical needs as well. GriefShare teaches the acronym, DEER. D-E-E-R. It stands for drink, eat, exercise, and rest. Grieving people sometimes forget to



take care of their basic needs. You might bring a bottle of water or Gatorade to remind them to hydrate. Tears are very depleting and that needs to be replenished. The appetite's often compromised during grief. So soup is a great choice to bring to your friend. It's easy to digest and it's light. You might put a casserole in her freezer for later. Offer to go for a walk with her, to get her moving and breathing. This can help release some stress and give her a small reprieve. Encourage her to rest. And to do that, you might bring her a soft blanket, or some body care items like lavender scented bath salts, or lotion or essential oils. I call 'em creature comforts. Then practically, you could offer to make phone calls, create lists, run errands. You could help her organize by bringing paper and pencil, sticky notes, and folders. There are a million details to take care of after someone dies. And it really feels like they never end.

Janet: Right.

Gail: So you might bring her a journal so she can begin writing down memories, her prayers, difficult emotions, or even things she wishes she could say one more time to her loved one. You can offer to help in other ways too. You might say, are there any immediate needs that you might have right now that I could help with? Or you could say, I would like to clean your bathroom or clean out your refrigerator.

Janet: Or do your laundry.

Gail: Yeah. Any of those, and then you could say, would that be helpful? And then she's able to respond. When we were packing to go to the airport to fly to California the morning after mom and dad died, a friend from our small group came by. She assessed the situation and she ran home and she made our lunch for us so we could eat before we left for the airport. We didn't have to think about getting food. She made potato soup, so simple, so comforting. I'll never forget her thoughtfulness and the sacrifice to drop what she was doing to do that.

Janet: So that's really helpful to think about what we can do that would be an encouragement. Many of us are uncomfortable because we're afraid we're gonna do something that's not helpful. And we may, and we can show each other a lot of grace, but what are some of the worst things that we can do when we're trying to serve? So we can at least be aware of that and try to avoid those things.

Gail: Yeah, a grieving person has a heavy load on their mind. So the first thing that comes to my mind about the worst thing you could do is talk at them. Trying to explain it to them by saying things like this happened because God wanted to...

Janet: As if we could even know that.

Jocelyn: Yeah. How could we know?



Gail: Yeah. Be amazed what people say. Or minimizing it, for example. It could have been so much worse if. Or trying to fix it with these statements, just stay busy so you don't think about it too much. Or you'll get over it in time. Or telling them how they should or shouldn't feel like you can be happy knowing they're in a better place. They're not happy right now. They're not with them. And then I would say, be aware of making it about yourself by saying things like I know exactly how you feel. Let me tell you what happened to me. Instead you might say, I can only imagine how you must be feeling right now. There might come a time later that you could share your story if it's helpful, but be sensitive about when, and even if you do. But on the flip side of that, not saying anything can also be very hurtful. It might make them feel like you don't care or that it's not really that important. If you don't know what to say, you can always sincerely say, I'm so sorry about your loss.

Janet: And I don't know what to say.

Gail: Yeah, exactly. I had that very thing happen to me. A friend at church caught me at church the first time I was back and she took me aside, put her hands on my shoulders, and said, I do not know what to say.

Janet: But it let you know.

Gail: She said volumes.

Janet: I care.

Gail: Yeah. It was really precious to me. Scripture contains the best help, but use good judgment about the appropriate time to share it. You might ask them if there's a scripture that's especially comforting to them, and would they like you to read it to them.

Janet: What a great idea.

Gail: Yeah. Or maybe you could say, would it be helpful if I read something from the Bible to you right now? Randy Patton says something that I think about a lot. He says there's a big difference between dispensing the word of God and ministering the word of God.

Jocelyn: I've been thinking a lot about that lately.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: Yep. We wanna minister the word of God.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Gail: Now here's a caveat on all of that. I've made some of these mistakes with the best of intentions.



Janet: Haven't we all?

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Gail: Yeah, and so there's a temptation, like you were talking about Janet to keep a distance.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: For fear that you might say something wrong, but don't let the fear of making a mistake keep you away from trying to comfort your friend. It might be clunky. It might be imperfect, but let your love for your friend motivate you. And as a griever myself, people have made those mistakes with me. When you're on the receiving end of a failed attempt of comfort, I'd encourage you to not add being offended to your mountain of pain.

Janet: Yeah. To realize they're trying to help and the fact that it wasn't helpful doesn't mean they weren't trying to help.

Jocelyn: And they're trying to love you.

Gail: Yeah, that's right. Most people want so badly to say or do something to make it better.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: Recognize that it's hard to know how, and they're trying, like you said. Also, something to remember is that they live in the shadow of death too. If you are a human on planet earth, you're gonna experience grief and your grief reminds others of that reality.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: That is hard. How do you see Jesus serving the grieving in the scriptures?

Gail: Well, Jesus carried the grief of the whole world, Jocelyn, as you know.

Janet: And chose it. I think that's what is so shocking. We don't even wanna respond to the grief that God chooses for us, but I can't fathom choosing what Jesus chose for us.

Jocelyn: Omnisciently. Knowing what it was gonna be like.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: Like there was nothing that was out of His understanding.

Gail: Isaiah 53 describes him as a man of sorrow acquainted with grief. So if we're gonna be like Christ, we'll be people sensitive to the sorrow all around us.



Janet: Yeah.

Gail: We will enter into the suffering of others. My favorite example of how Jesus served the grieving is the way He ministered to His disciples leading up to their grief upon His upcoming death. They're about to enter a season of grief like no other. The hope of the world is about to die. They'd left everything to follow Him, and it's about to appear to them that all is lost. And we can learn so much by the things He said to them. In John 16: 20-22, He says to His disciples, "I tell you the truth. You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come, but when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. So with you now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take your joy away". So Jesus is honest about the pain of separation, even knowing it's temporary. He points to joy, but it's future joy.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: He's not pretending that it doesn't hurt right now. I think there's a big misconception sometimes that if you're a Christian and you're experiencing deep sorrow, that you must not have enough faith. I think that idea adds to the burden of grief, and I don't think it's scriptural.

Janet: Right.

Gail: Here, Jesus affirms that grief is an appropriate response to death. Jesus wept at the death of His friend Lazarus, even though He was about to bring him back to life.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: We also have the example of Paul at the life threatening illness of his friend, Epaphroditus. Paul said that if he had died, he would've had sorrow upon sorrow. And then after the stoning of Stephen in the book of Acts, it says godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: So Jesus doesn't just leave His disciples with the news that they'll grieve. He shows them also that what 1 Thessalonians 4:13 teaches us, "We grieve, but not like those who have no hope". Jesus promises them real hope. He says He is not gonna leave them as orphans. He's gonna send the comforting counselor, the Holy Spirit, to help them. So they'll know they're not alone. And then in John 17, He prays for them, and for all future believers and everybody should read that chapter. Do you want to be encouraged. The people He's praying for in the future that is us right now. He prays that they would be comforted by sharing in the love of the Father and the Son. He prays for God's protection over their souls because living in the world is hard. He assures us that God will not lose His own. And this can be a huge comfort for a person who's lost a loved one. They're not really lost if they're in Christ. We can know exactly where they are.



Jesus was honest about death and grief, and He prepared them for it. He promised comfort for now and joy for the future that can never be taken away. He prayed for them and for us, and according to Romans 8, He's still doing that interceding for us.

Janet: I love that. And it's such a reminder that grieving, it's not just not sinful. It's not just okay. It's right, and godly. To grieve loss is right.

Jocelyn: And we can bear the image of Christ.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: As He dealt with people who are grieving.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: Or getting ready to grieve.

Gail: Yeah, that's our mandate, right? As you say, Jocelyn.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: So you mentioned earlier, the ministry of presence, I think is how you put it, Gail. Why do you think that's so important that we're present there? Why is that time of life, especially meaningful for serving, and especially that?

Gail: Because this is a time of reevaluation of one's life. It's an opportunity for them to reevaluate their life. They begin to ask hard questions. Like what do I really believe? And on what authority am I gonna base it? What's the meaning of my life? What happens after death? Can the things I've been living for hold the weight of my whole existence for all of eternity?

Janet: Wow.

Gail: I think people carry these questions beneath the surface of their life all the time, but when death enters the picture, they become hard to ignore. I've seen people lean into these questions and I've seen people run from these questions. Leaning into these questions, creates an opportunity for them to find peace, but running from these questions, results in confusion and a chasing after the wind, as it says in Ecclesiastes. Some people try to answer these questions by turning to their lost loved one as a kind of a savior. We see this a lot. They often say they're watching over them from heaven.

Janet: Oh, wow.

Jocelyn: That's interesting.



Gail: They wanna be good so they can be worthy to see them again. The reason they wanna go to heaven is solely to see their loved one again. We get the opportunity to point them to a better Savior. The One who has the power to overcome death and be a source of life that can never be lost. It will be wonderful for them to see their loved one again, but they will get to see the One who made that possible.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: And they can start knowing Him now and looking forward to seeing Him one day, just as much as they look forward to seeing their loved one.

Jocelyn: That's so helpful.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: John 15: 13 says, "Greater love has no one than this, that He laid down His life for His friends". And Jesus is the one who did that.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: I love there's a quote on the GriefShare videos that says you can always trust the One who died for you.

Jocelyn: Oh.

Gail: So true. We also wanna show people that there can be an authority undergirding their beliefs. The Bible says about itself that all scripture is God breathed. I really like 1 Thessalonians 2:13. It says, "When you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men, but as it actually is the word of God". And that is powerful. I don't have to wonder or come up with what seems right to me.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: I can base my life and my future on the authority of God's word, and I can know that it's never gonna steer me in the wrong direction. Some people struggle with their purpose for life after their loved one dies. Many turn to self-fulfillment in various forms, but that only works as long as the circumstances hold out. When things change, I've just lost my purpose and my hope. The result can be depression or even despair. Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life". God has a better purpose, a true reliable source of life, and we get to help people trade an inferior desire for a superior desire. 1 John 5: 11-13 tells us God has given us eternal life and this life is in His son. He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the son of God, does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in



the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life". So hobbies are great, but not as a source of life.

Janet: Right.

Gail: Pastor Viars asked this question on the GriefShare videos. He says, who am I? What really defines my existence? I want that to be based on something that can never be lost. So if we have life in Christ, we have something that can never be lost and a purpose to live for. So grief in part can be preparation time for the purpose God has for the remainder of your earthly life.

Jocelyn: Oh, that's very helpful.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: And then finally, grief can be the precursor to finding peace. So losing someone to death is not something that tends to usher peace into your life because griefs not peaceful. But we long for peace.

Janet: Yes, we do.

Gail: And God's designed us for peace, but we all have the shadow of death hanging over us, and that can threaten any hope of peace any day. So that's why Jesus came, the Prince of Peace. He came to bring us peace with God by rectifying the separation that our sin has caused, and the peace of God resulting in new abundant life now. He says, I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly. That starts right now. He also says I'm the resurrection and the life, and he, who believes in me will live even though he dies. That's for my forever. And then he said, peace, I leave with you. My peace, I give you. I do not give as the world gives. So don't let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. Worldly peace says if I can manage to arrange my circumstances to my liking then I'll be at peace, and we all have our lists of what will create a peaceful life.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: But the peace Jesus offers isn't found in earthly circumstances, thankfully, because those can fall apart at any given moment.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: The peace of God is the promise that He'll satisfy our deepest longings for all of eternity. Psalm 16:11. One of my favorite scriptures says you have made known to me the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand. And He's promised to be with us, helping us persevere until that day, giving us purposeful existence on



earth until we get there, our true home. In her book, *Home: How Heaven and the New Earth Satisfy Our Deepest Longings* by Elyse Fitzpatrick. Have read you read it?

Janet: I haven't read it, but I've heard about it.

Gail: It's so good. She says, I find within myself a longing that no family gathering party or reunion can alleviate. Isn't there anything here that will ultimately satisfy my deepest longings? What is this emptiness I feel? What am I hoping to find? I sense something important is missing, and though I anxiously search for it. It remains elusive. I feel it every day. Does this feeling have a name? I think so. I think it's called home sickness. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "God has set eternity in the hearts of man yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end". Well, we wanna help grieving people fathom what God has done. To answer the question since my life matters for eternity, what do I live for now?

Janet: Oh, I love that.

Jocelyn: So what are some ideas of ways to be especially compassionate to someone who's grieving?

Gail: Okay. I've got a list here of ideas.

Janet: She just happens to have a list.

Gail: I happen to have a list. So go with them to a grief support group.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: Invite them to your small group Bible study. Read the Bible together with them, or offer to. Go through a book study on grief or on heaven with them. Share encouraging notes or scriptures or stories through text, emails, or cards so they'll know your thinking of them. Share music with them. That's one of my favorites. Invite them over or out to lunch or coffee occasionally so they know they're not forgotten. Here's a biggie, talk about their loved one. Use his or her name.

Janet: That's so helpful to hear you say that because I think sometimes we're afraid to. Because we think what if they're happy right now and I bring it up and I make them sad.

Jocelyn: Makes them sad. Yeah.

Gail: And that you just, my next two goals. It hurts when people act as if they never existed.

Janet: Yeah.

Gail: And like you said, maybe if I don't mention it, they won't be sad. So don't make your number one goal to keep them from crying. Tears are a gift.



Janet: That's so good.

Gail: God collects tears. Let them cry. They need to cry. Cry with them. And remember shared suffering is endurable suffering.

Jocelyn: Wow, that's good. That's a good list.

Janet: Well, as we're starting to wrap this up, I do know I'm gonna ask you about any training or resources you recommend. We already know, obviously GriefShare is very helpful. I know you also have a list of some favorite Bible passages that you've used and we're gonna make sure we link those in the show notes. Are there any other training or resources that you would recommend that we would just, if somebody wants to learn more either to help or because they're grieving?

Gail: Yeah, and I'm glad you mentioned GriefShare because people come sometimes that they haven't had a lost, loved one, but they want to be prepared

Janet: Right.

Gail: Or know how to help somebody. We love when people come to GriefShare for that reason. Some helpful books are God's Healing for Life's Losses by Robert Kellemen.

Janet: Yep.

Gail: That's a good book. Dark clouds, Deep Mercy.

Janet: Oh.

Gail: By Mark Vroegop is so good.

Janet: I love that book.

Gail: Hearing Jesus Speak Into Your Sorrow by Nancy Guthrie.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: Is a good one. Gentle and Lowly. think it's The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers is the subtitle by Dane Ortlund. So good. Why? Trusting God When You Don't Understand by Anne Graham Lotz is a good book. And then the one I mentioned, Home: How Heaven and the New Earth Satisfy Our Deepest Longings by Elyse Fitzpatrick. Another one I thought of was Heaven by Randy Alcorn.

Janet: Yes.



Gail: Very, very hopeful.

Janet: That's one that I read parts of to my mom right before she died, and I would agree. That's been very helpful. Thank you, Gail. This is, it's heavy and hopeful and eternally focused, and I love that with a topic that many of us try to avoid, but we don't need to. We have a suffering Savior, who's going to be with us and I'm in a small group right now. We're just finishing up 1 Peter, and you see how, because of Christ, suffering now has meaning and purpose, and I just finished the book today. We finished our Bible study, and you leave realizing and it's temporary.

Gail: Yeah.

Janet: The day's gonna come. We suffer with Christ, but we will also, be glorified with Christ, and I love that He gives us that hope.

Jocelyn: I also really appreciate the explanation that you brought into this topic of how theology guides the way we think about it. Your comments today were so filled with scripture and it just was very tightly connected to, and then what you do about it. So I think sometimes we think of grief kind of mystically, like something that we magically get over. No, your theology drove you in the way that you dealt with your sorrow, and it drives you now in the way that you help others who are in their grief. So I think it's so important that we see that.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: Grief is an application of our beliefs about God.

Janet: And it's gonna surface the parts of our heart that are maybe not theologically attuned, but now they can be.

Jocelyn: Which turns grief to an opportunity.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: An opportunity to see more of our heart to see if our love for Christ is connected to reality, or if it's just, you know, a little bit theoretical.

Janet: I love that.

Gail: Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely. Death can be a severe mercy.

Janet: Yes.

Gail: In one sense. It brings us to the Truth.

Janet: Right.



Gail: You know, that we desperately need.

Janet: Excellent. Well, thank you. Thank you for joining us, those of you who are listening, and I hope you'll join us for our next episode as we continue on this journey.

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