

This year during Lent, we are exploring the emotions of God. Emotions and relationships go together; we cannot have a relationship without involving some emotions, and in a strange way, emotions define a relationship. We might even go as far to say, relationships grow and improve when fed on a regular diet, of a variety of good emotions! And the opposite is true: starve a relationship of good emotions or feed it inappropriate emotions, and the relationship fails to meet God's standards.

I recall our emotions being on edge, the occasions we sent our son Ranjeet when he was younger, to the grocers' around the corner, and he took longer returning because he met friends along the way; imagine then, God's emotions when He sent His Son to take on the power of death, on the cross!

We started a few weeks ago, by considering God's delight as the head of the family when we consider ourselves as *belonging* to His family (not being associated with); last Sunday we reflected on God's emotions of *loneliness* when alienated by us. Today we want to examine God's emotion of **grief**.

In the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, we find God created everything, and everything He created, had life! There was no mention of death and no mention of anything with a lifespan!

When God created the first human beings, He handed His creation over to them - like a turnkey project. *Here is the key to my creation! Before you go in, let me tell you your responsibilities: everything I have created is yours to look after and enjoy, **EXCEPT** two trees whose fruit was not ripe, whose time has yet to come. One of the two trees, the tree of the knowledge of good and*

*evil God said, “for when you eat of it, you will surely die”, if you eat the fruit of this tree, death will put a barrier between us; death will separate us, and you will on the other side of life, the side of death. Death is a weapon in the hands of a person who does **NOT** share my Holiness. So be careful of your actions and be careful of him!*

And this is exactly what happened! The merchant of death challenged our intelligence by posing the question, “**Did God really say, ..?**”, and we walked right into the trap. God then moved rapidly to protect us from the tree of life, which would have resulted in permanent separation from God, forever!

In this early account of creation and the fall, we get a glimpse into God’s emotions: the ecstatic **joy** of creating the universe, the earth and the human being; the **satisfaction** of a job well done, followed by rest; **pride** of handing over His creation to the human being; **consternation** when the human being disobeyed (*what have you done?!*); **pathos** and **sadness** having to inform human beings of the consequences of their actions, and finally, acts of **love**, protecting them from further foolish actions, and providing them “clothing” to protect them in the broken world in which they found themselves.

God has emotions and God is emotional!

Most of us have difficulty coming to grips with the fact, God has a range of emotions. We imagine God as angry, lashing out at the wrong we do, and the wrong in the world. We think of God who punishes when we step out of line, even by a whisker! We imagine a blood-thirsty God, intent on killing armies and whole populations who go against Him.

In all His emotions, one of God's emotions we rarely consider, is **GRIEF**. The *pain* of mind, body and soul, produced by loss, misfortune, injury, or evils of any kind, is grief; grief is also *sorrow* caused by the finality of separation in death. Grief is also the pain of heart and soul, when we watch someone destroying themselves, contrary to all their teaching and instruction, because they have been given freedom to choose, freedom to decide for themselves, freedom make choices of life. Grief is a very complex emotion.

The first time we read in the Bible about God's grief, is just before the account of Noah.

“God saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil, imagined evil—evil, evil, evil from morning to night. And God regretted that He had made man on the earth, and He was GRIEVED at heart.” (Genesis 6:5-6)

The human mind, heart and soul had become so depraved, God **mourned** (regretted) the lives of all people who would die in the flood to come, and His whole being was consumed with sorrow (grief), until it hurt!

There are several occasions when **“God grieved”**. After delivering the nation of Israel safe from the Egyptian army in hot pursuit, God grieved when the people abandoned Him by making a golden calf and worshipped it instead¹. God experienced the pain of rejection by the very people He saved. So severe was this pain, God grieved.

Several generations later, now settled as the nation of Israel, they rejected God as their King, and badgered Him to give them a king like all the nations around them. Through Samuel, God chose Saul as their first King. Within a few years, pride entered Saul's heart. God was no longer whom

¹ Exodus 32:14

he served, so he consulted a witch. God was grieved He had made Saul King over Israel.²

As we examine the occasions when “God grieved”, we find God’s grief is not *regret*, “why did I do this? I shouldn’t have done this ... why, O why!” This would be self-pity.

God’s grief, however, is not self-centred. Last Sunday we explored God’s loneliness and discovered His loneliness is the result of us abandoning Him! We keep asking God, “*Where are you when we need you?*”, not realising, God has not abandoned us; we have abandoned Him.

In this loneliness, God grieves:

I have given them everything they need. I have granted their wish ... why are they so ungrateful?

I am trying to steer them away from impending disaster, why do they insist on going their own way?

God is not indulging in self-pity, regretting ever having made us. God is grieving our separation by death, He is grieving the distance in our relationship with Him, and longing for the day when He will have us back together.

How then, do we respond to someone grieving?

On 24th February, Dayspring published a devotion titled, “WHEN YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT TO SAY OR DO”, which offers four practical suggestions, what to say or do, when you don’t know what to say or do, especially in the presence of a person grieving (March issue of Grapevine).

² 1 Samuel 15:11, 35

In this devotion, the last of four simple suggestions is, ***Be present and willing to listen***. I read this while finalising this message and was particularly struck how relevant it is. God is grieving the loss of our relationship, and the best way we can respond to His grief is to be in His presence and listen to Him! This would delight God no end; He would know we care; He would know we are in sympathy with His pain and sorrow. We cannot be in empathy with God; we can never feel God's emotions the way He does, but we can certainly be in sympathy.

I have come across people who feel the need to participate, in their own small way, in God's pain, that unless they do, their life as a Christian is incomplete.

In many countries, people re-enact the crucifixion of Christ. If it is a theatre performance like the nativity at Christmas, it is acceptable, but we must make a strenuous and conscious effort to remind ourselves, **NOT** to re-enact the event, in the belief that doing so, brings us closer to God by suffering with Him.

The crucifixion took place at a time in history. Seeing His Son die on the cross, God was grieved. But God no longer grieves, because Jesus has broken through the barrier of death and is reunited with the Father.

In this age, the age after the resurrection of Jesus, we are, however, cautioned not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Writing to the Church at Ephesus, Paul says, *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*³

The Holy Spirit is entrusted with the responsibility of bringing God's plans together, in preparation for the time when Christ returns to claim us, and

³ Ephesians 4:30

take us into the Kingdom of God. To grieve the Holy Spirit is to frustrate this plan of God, that **ALL** should be saved and returned to God.

As we prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate Easter, let's pause to consider, God who grieves; not for His Son Jesus who died a most horrible death on the cross.

God grieves for **US**. He is overcome with sorrow and pain, at the burden we must carry, and the effort we must make, to stay the course and be faithful to Him. He invites us into a deeper relationship with Him, which is only possible through Jesus our Christ who says, *Come to Me, all you who labour, are heavy-laden and overburdened, and I will cause you to rest. I will ease and relieve and refresh your souls. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble (lowly) in heart, and you will find rest, relief and ease and refreshment and recreation and blessed quiet) for your souls.*

This morning, take up Jesus' offer! Your decision to renew and refresh your relationship with Him, brings joy to the Father, for He then knows, you are safe and He will enjoy your company in eternity.

AMEN