

Times of Loss



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; 1 Pet. 5:6, 7; Gen. 37:17–28; Luke 16:13; Rom. 6:16; 1 Cor. 15:26.*

Memory Text: “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (*Philippians 3:8, NKJV*).

The moment Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they experienced their first loss, the loss of innocence. And this lost innocence was replaced with selfishness, conflict, blame, and a desire for control and supremacy over each other.

Shortly after the Fall, they witnessed the first loss of life when they were given animal skins to cover their nakedness. Banned from access to the tree of life lest they would eat and live forever, they also lost their perfect garden home, and years later they lost their son, Abel, at the hands of his brother, Cain. In the end, one of them lost their spouse, and finally the surviving partner lost his or her own life. So many losses came as a result of one decision.

Yes, we all know the reality, and pain, of loss, and most of us feel it the deepest when this loss strikes us in the family. And no wonder, for in the family we have our closest bonds; thus, loss there, in its many varied forms, hits us the hardest.

This week, as we continue to look at family life, we will look at it in the context of the various times of loss.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 1.

Loss of Health

We are thousands of years from the tree of life; and we all feel it, too, especially when it comes to our physical health. Sooner or later, unless we are killed when young by trauma, we all come to the harsh reality of the loss of health.

And, as difficult as the loss of health is, how much more painful when it strikes, not just ourselves, but someone in our own family? How many parents have, especially as they have dealt with an ill child, wished it had been them, the parent, who was sick instead of the child? Unfortunately, we are not given that choice.

What do all these accounts have in common? *Mark 5:22–24, 35–43; Matt. 15:22–28; Luke 4:38, 39; John 4:46–54.*

In each of these cases, and no doubt in so many more, it was a family member beseeching Jesus’ help for another family member.

No question, we recognize that we suffer because we live in a fallen world. When sin entered the world, not only did death enter, but also chronic pain, illness, and disease. When faced with a chronic or terminal illness, we may experience shock, anger, despair, and may even feel like shouting, “My God, my God, why have you deserted me? Why are you so far away? Won’t you listen to my groans and come to my rescue?” (*Ps. 22:1, CEV*). As David did, we’d do well taking our questions, anger, and pain to God.

In many ways, sickness and suffering will remain a mystery until death is finally defeated at Jesus’ return. At the same time, we can glean important truths from God’s Word. While Job endured unspeakable pain, he experienced a deeper intimacy with God. He explains, “I heard about you from others; now I have seen you with my own eyes” (*Job 42:5, CEV*). Paul had some sort of chronic illness, and how he dealt with it tells us that suffering can equip us to comfort others, it can give us compassion for others who are hurting, and it can enable us to minister more effectively (*2 Cor. 1:3–5*); that is, if we don’t allow it to break us.

Whether we or family members are suffering with illness, what promises can we claim? Why, at times like this, is the reality of Jesus, our Lord, suffering on the cross so important to us? What does Jesus on the cross teach us about God’s unfailing love, even amid illness in our family?

Loss of Trust

We are all sinful, dysfunctional people who at some time will prove ourselves to be untrustworthy to someone who trusted us. And who hasn't been the victim of someone else's betrayal of our trust? And, as hard as such a loss of trust can be, it's always so much worse when we betray, or are betrayed, by a family member.

Sometimes it may seem easier to cut our losses and run when we decide the relationship isn't worth the effort of rebuilding. Of course, it's not so easy when it's a family member, such as a spouse. You could even say that one of the purposes of marriage is to teach us the lesson of how to rebuild trust when it is broken.

When trust in a relationship has been compromised, how can both trust and the relationship be healed and saved? *1 Pet. 5:6, 7; 1 John 4:18; James 5:16; Matt. 6:14, 15.*

Rebuilding broken trust is like a journey; you must take it one step at a time. The journey begins with a sincere acknowledgment of the hurt and confession of the truth, whatever the offense and whoever the offender.

When adultery has been the cause of the breach, healing begins when the betrayer confesses. As part of the healing process, confession must accompany complete openness on the part of the betrayer. There can be nothing that remains hidden, or else, when it is found out (and it will be found out), it will destroy the trust that was reestablished. And the second time trust is breached, it becomes even harder to heal than the first breach was.

Rebuilding trust takes time and patience. The more serious the offense, the more time it will take for it to be repaired. Accept the fact that sometimes it's going to feel as if you are moving two steps forward and three steps backward. One day it seems like there's hope for tomorrow, and the next day, you feel like running away. Many have, however, been able to rebuild their broken relationship and developed a deeper, more intimate, more satisfying, and happier marriage.

What principles in healing a marriage can be used in the cases of other kinds of broken trust? At the same time, what might be a situation in which, though there is forgiveness, there is no more trust, nor should there be?

Loss of Trust, Continued

Another way that trust is lost is through family violence. Unthinkable as it is, research reveals that the home is the single most violent place in society. Family violence touches all kinds of families, including Christian homes. Violence is an assault of any kind—verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, or active or passive neglect—that is committed by one or more persons against another in the family.

The Bible includes accounts of family violence, even among God’s people. What are your thoughts and feelings as you read these verses? Why do you think these stories were preserved in Scripture?

Gen. 37:17–28 _____

2 Sam. 13:1–22 _____

2 Kings 16:3, 17:17, 21:6 _____

Abusive behavior is the conscious choice of a person to exercise power and control over another. It cannot be explained or excused by alcoholism, stress, the need to fulfill sexual desires, the need for better control of anger, or any behavior of the victim. Victims are not responsible for causing the abuser to abuse. Abusers distort and pervert love, for “love does no harm” (*Rom. 13:10, NIV*). Professional treatment can facilitate change in an abuser’s behavior but only if the person takes responsibility for the behavior and seeks such help. To those who will open themselves to His presence, God *is able to do exceedingly abundantly* to help abusers stop abusing, to repent of their attitudes and behavior, to make restitution in every way possible, and to embrace the qualities of agape love to heal their own hearts and to love others (*compare Eph. 3:20*).

Try to put yourself in the place of someone traumatized by violence. What words of acceptance, comfort, and hope would you like to hear? Why is it important to provide safety and caring acceptance rather than offering advice about how to live better with the abuser?

Loss of Freedom

God alone knows how many millions, even billions, of people struggle with some form of addiction. To this day, scientists still don't understand exactly what causes it, even though in some cases they actually can see the part of our brain in which the cravings and desires are located.

Unfortunately, however, finding the locations of those addictions is not the same thing as freeing us from the addictions.

Addiction is hard on everyone, not just the addict. Family members—parents, spouses, children—all suffer greatly when any member of the family is under the grip of a power that they just can't seem to get free of.

Drugs, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, pornography, sex, even food—what makes these things into addictions is the habitual and progressive nature of their use or abuse. You are unable to stop even when you know that it is harming you. While enjoying your freedom of choice, you become a slave to whatever you are addicted to, and so you actually lose your freedom. Peter has a simple explanation of what an addiction is and its results: “They promise freedom to everyone. But they are merely slaves of filthy living, because people are slaves of whatever controls them” (2 Pet. 2:19, CEV).

What are the things that can lead people into addiction? *Luke 16:13, Rom. 6:16, James 1:13–15, 1 John 2:16.*

Sin and addiction are not, necessarily, the same thing. You can commit a sin that you are not addicted to, though so often it can turn into an addiction. How much better, through the power of God, to stop the sin before it turns into an addiction. And, of course, the only lasting solution to the sin and addiction problem is by receiving a new heart. “Because we belong to Christ Jesus, we have killed our selfish feelings and desires” (Gal. 5:24, CEV). Paul also explains to the Romans what it means to die to that sinful, addictive nature so we can live for Christ (Rom. 6:8–13), and then adds, “Let the Lord Jesus Christ be as near to you as the clothes you wear. Then you won't try to satisfy your selfish desires” (Rom. 13:14, CEV).

Who has not personally known the struggle of addiction, either ourselves or in that of others, maybe even family members? How can you help people realize that it's not an admission of spiritual failure if, even as Christians, they might still need professional help?

Loss of Life

As human beings, we know the reality of death. We read about it, we see it, and we maybe have even come close to facing it ourselves.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:26. How is death described, and why is it described this way?

Who, having lost a loved one, doesn't experience for themselves just how great an enemy death is? On the other hand, the dead have it "good." If, in the Lord, they close their eyes and in what seems like an instant to them, they are raised to immortality. "To the believer, death is but a small matter. . . . To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. The life is hid with Christ in God, and " 'when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.' "—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 787.

No, it's the living, especially the remaining friends or family members, who know the real pain and grief following a death. The fact is that grief is a natural, normal response to loss. It is the emotional suffering we experience when something or someone we love is taken away.

The grieving process is not the same for everyone, but in general most people go through several stages. The first and most common reaction to the death of a loved one is shock and denial, even when the death is expected. Shock is your emotional protection from being too suddenly overwhelmed by the loss, and it may last from two to three months. You also may go through a time when you are constantly absorbed by thoughts of your loved one, even during common, daily tasks. Often conversations turn to your loss or loved one. This period may last from six months to a year.

The stage of despair and depression is a long period of grief, probably the most painful and protracted stage for the griever, during which you gradually come to terms with the reality of your loss. During this stage, you may experience a range of emotions, such as anger, guilt, regret, sadness, and anxiety. The goal of grieving is not to eliminate all your pain or the memories of your loss. In the final stage of recovery, you begin to have a renewed interest in daily activities and to function normally from day to day.

What comforting thoughts can you find in the following passages? *Rom. 8:31–39, Rev. 21:4, 1 Cor. 15:52–57.*

Further Thought: Many have suffered as a result of their addictions.

They have become slaves to their desires and have lost their money, their jobs, their health, and their freedom. But Jesus came to give us freedom from our sin and from all our addictions, and “ ‘if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed’ ” (*John 8:36, NKJV*). Jesus also promised that He would always be with us (*Matt. 28:20, Isa. 43:2*); so, we do not have to wage this war alone. In fact, we must remember that the battle is the Lord’s (*1 Sam. 17:47*), and He promises victory (*1 Pet. 1:3–9*). Today you can begin on the road to victory over any addiction and receive the freedom you desire and what God wants for you. This doesn’t mean you won’t struggle, and it doesn’t mean that, at times, you won’t fail. But the good news is that as long as you don’t give up on the Lord, He won’t give up on you. And yes, there’s nothing wrong with seeking professional help, too. Just as the Lord can use a medical professional to help you with health problems, He can use a professional counselor to help with addiction, as well.

“When difficulties and trials surround us, we should flee to God, and confidently expect help from Him who is mighty to save and strong to deliver. We must ask for God’s blessing if we would receive it. Prayer is a duty and a necessity; but do we not neglect praise? Should we not oftener render thanksgiving to the Giver of all our blessings? We need to cultivate gratitude. We should frequently contemplate and recount the mercies of God, and laud and glorify His holy name, even when we are passing through sorrow and affliction.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 268.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What part does forgiveness play in loss of trust and in the healing of a broken relationship? *Matt. 6:12–15; 18:21, 22*. “Love . . . doesn’t keep a record of wrongs that others do” (*1 Cor. 13:5, CEV*).
- ❷ What is the benefit of contemplating and recounting the mercies of God while we’re passing through sorrow and affliction?
- ❸ What are practical ways your church family, as a whole, can help those who are struggling with any kind of loss?

God Had Other Plans

By ANDREW McCHESNEY, Adventist Mission

As she finished high school, Jo-Anna Clayton devised a plan for college.

For the first year, she would enroll in a community college near home in the U.S. state of West Virginia. This way she could take basic classes at reduced tuition costs and stay with her parents and three younger sisters. After that, she would transfer to a Seventh-day Adventist school to study nursing.

But the plan collapsed during the summer. She just couldn't find a way to get to the community college from her parents' rural home. Jo-Anna couldn't obtain a driver's license because her parents, natives of Jamaica, were sorting out the family's U.S. residency papers. Her parents couldn't drive her back and forth, and no public buses stopped near her home.

Soon, only a month remained before the start of the school year, and she had nowhere to study.

Then her mother, Suzanne, remembered that family friends worked at Weimar Institute in California. Jo-Anna immediately went online and did some research.

"I don't want to go to California!" she told her mother. "That's too far away."

"You should at least think about it and pray about it," her mother replied.

Later that day, she did pray. "Please don't make me go to California," she said. "If I have to go to California, let one of my friends come with me."

A week later, Jo-Anna spoke with a Weimar recruiter and began to think that maybe God wanted her to study there. But a major barrier stood ahead: her parents could cover only the down payment and the first three months of classes.

Then a series of unexpected events rapidly unfolded.

Jo-Anna applied for and received a scholarship. While assisting people affected by local flooding, she connected with several Adventist physicians who pledged \$500 a month toward her tuition. She raised \$1,800 by writing financial assistance letters to family friends. Soon she had enough money to enroll, and she started classes in the fall.

"I didn't have any doubt that I was where God wanted me to be," she said.

While she missed her family dreadfully for the first few months, the realization that she was at the center of God's will energized her as she worked 25 hours a week to earn more tuition money.



Jo-Anna, now 19, completed her first year debt-free, and she said God still pays her bills.

"I work like crazy, and when I do what I can, I say again, 'Lord, this is what I can provide. Now show me what You can do,' " she said. "He works it out for me."