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What Hope Can There Be in the Face of Such Tragedy?

Jeremiah 29:11: *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

Guest: Stephen M. King, CFSP

(Owner of the Mystic Funeral Home, Mystic, CT)

Here we are just a few days before Christmas 2012. This is a time when there is usually a magic in the air, an excitement for friends, family and good cheer. Usually, that is the case - but not this year. No, not this year. Something happened, and as a result the giddy joy is gone. We have suffered a great loss. A few short days ago, an unimaginable crime was committed and 27 people, 20 of them 6-and 7-year old children, had their lives taken from them, brutally and without mercy. Today we honor their memory and recognize the pain of their grief-stricken families and friends. Today we also search to find how the hope of the true meaning of Christmas can give us - all of us - strength to cope, strength to stand, and strength to begin to move forward.

Our First Theme: Sorrow

Sorrow and pain are a legacy that humankind has had to live with since man's first sin Matthew 2:18

Psalms 130:1: *Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.*

Question for Stephen: You were up in Newtown, CT, this past week. What did you do, what were your impressions and observations and how did it affect you? Stephen participated in one of the funerals. It was very difficult for the funeral directors involved. Listen to his full answer by listening to the archived program.

As we cry at the tragedy of our losses, God knows our pain, and God cries with us: Jeremiah 9:17-18

Because there is sorrow, the sorrow of sin, death and tragedy, finding hope is an urgent matter. We look for hope in Christmas' true meaning.

Our Second Theme: Uncertainty

Deep sorrow and loss inevitably bring uncertainty, for they shake the foundational relationships that our lives are built upon, and they pierce the armor of stability that we find protection behind. This, therefore, can be a fearful time as well, for now as uncertainty settles in, it changes the punctuation of our lives from periods and exclamations to just questions...lots and lots of questions.

Question for Stephen: What can you tell us about the timeline of grief? There isn't a right or wrong way of coping with grief. Individuals deal with grief differently. In speaking with the families we deal with, the first six to 18 months are the most difficult. During this time period, loved ones are no longer reaching out to the hurting person, but it's a stage when the numbness disappears and reality sets in and they are back to their normal lives. It's not a time to produce, achieve or accomplish. When someone vanishes from our lives, we may discover the most routine task becomes extremely difficult.

Grief doesn't follow a pattern; it is more like a roller coaster up and down.

Uncertainty was an overwhelming factor in the development of God's plan of hope for men. This song is about Mary on the road to Bethlehem. She is tired, frightened and looking for the Father's guidance.

Sometimes it is appropriate to talk to a professional about your grief. Some people need to talk about the loss over and over again and family may become worn out, so counseling may be helpful.

Chase Kowalski, age 7

Josephine Gay, age 7

Ana Marquez-Greene, age 6

Dawn Hochsprung, age 47

Mary Sherlach, age 56

Benjamin Wheeler, age 6

Catherine Hubbard, age 6

Caroline Previdi, age 6

Noah Pozner, age 6

Charlotte Bacon, age 6

Dylan Hockley, age 6

James Mattioli, age 6

Grace McDonnell, age 7

Victoria Soto, age 27

Emilie Parker, age 6

Jessica Rekos, age 6

Olivia Engel, age 6

Allison Wyatt, age 6

Lauren Rousseau, age 30

Anne Marie Murphy, age 52

Avielle Richman, age 6

Jack Pinto, age 6

Daniel Barden, age 7

Rachel D'Avino, age 29

Madeleine Hsu, age 6

Nancy Lanza, age 52



These questions would have been in Mary's mind from the beginning: Luke 1:26-35

When we are dealing with sorrow, uncertainty follows. It seems there is nothing stable in our lives. It is then we want to look to the true hope for the human race, the true meaning of Christmas.

Going back to the original life changing announcement to Mary: Ridicule and gossip would follow as this young woman carried this baby to term - all the while knowing it was the will of God - yet bearing the judgment of those around her. So, amidst the uncertainty of all these circumstances, Christ the Savior is born.

Our Third Theme: Humble Strength

Once faced with the uncertainty born out of deep sorrow and loss, we are still obliged to walk the path of our life. Strangely, what was once a paved road has now become mud-filled mire through which each step has now become a stress and a strain. Our hope lies in the taking of each step, for in so doing we almost imperceptibly begin to develop a humble strength.

Question for Stephen: What would you say are the most important ingredients for people to deal with loss?

1. *Be there.*
2. *Tolerate silences.*
3. *Listen and accept in a non-judgmental way.*
4. *Avoid the use of clichés. ("Think of all the good times!" "Give it time, it will get better!" "You're young, you will marry again!")*
5. *Encourage them to talk about their loved one.*
6. *Be practical in your offer of support.*
7. *Mentioning your loved one's name.*
8. *Accepting that tears are normal and healthy.*
9. *Don't try to fill in conversations with a lot of outside news.*
10. *Remember that grief may take many years to work through.*
11. *Acknowledging birth days, death days and anniversaries.*
12. *Accepting that you cannot really make them feel better; they will have to work through the grief process themselves. It is painful. You may not be able to make it better, but you can be there with them while they feel bad.*

Luke 2:1-13

The integrity of the promises of God - the best reason for hope: Isaiah 9:6-7

Death, sorrow and grief happen in a world of sin. But there is an answer in the plan of God. There is a way for us to deal with our sorrow and difficulty, a way for us to get ahold of it, and achieve the humble strength in the experience.

Our Fourth Theme: Endurance

In the wake of tragic loss, endurance is rarely set upon as an objective to achieve. However, it does come to us, often as an unsought for and unexpected, yet welcome, ally and it quietly performs its vital and life altering work upon our lives.

Question for Stephen: Based on your own experience, how should people explain the events in Newtown to their children? Avoid it? Use sweeping generalizations? Get specific? Stephen answers that it is important to answer them. Hear his full advice by listening to the archived program.

Matthew 2:1-12: So, their objective was clear - travel as far as necessary to find a child. Once found, pay him homage for he would be the hope of the world. Dedication truly develops endurance. We need to withstand the forces of evil.



Our Fifth Theme: New Reality

It is often through the unperceived development of endurance that we find ourselves one day prepared for the new reality that inevitably takes hold of our lives. While this new reality is of necessity somewhat of our own design, it is not of our preference. Yet, it must stay.

Question for Stephen: We often talk about closure with tragic events. In your work, do you see closure happen or begin to happen and how important do you think it is? *He does not necessarily see closure during the days of the funeral. It starts to begin after the daily routine starts. Closure is on the timeline of grief, sometime in the future. It allows us to accept our new reality.*

Closure allows us to step over the challenges of pitfalls without losing the attachment to our loved one we lost.

So the wise men saw a new reality as their expectations were indeed fulfilled, but in a most unlikely manner. This would be a template for the whole life of Jesus.

The new reality Jesus brought was hope for the entire world. That is a bridge to be able to accept the new reality after grief and loss.

Simeon the Prophet sought a new reality that would bring hope to all: Luke 2:21-29: Being aged, the only thing Simeon looked forward to in his life was a glimpse, just a glimpse of God's gift of redemption. He sees the baby, takes him in his arms and knows that his life is now complete. He knew in his arms he held the hope of the world, a new reality.

Grief cannot be delineated by timing because people grieve in different ways. Closure cannot be rushed, but you can feed it the right kinds of input. The plan of God takes time as well. It takes longer than we expect it to or would want it to, but it just takes time and we must respect that.

Luke 2:30-33: Simeon realizes the full import of redemption. He is a light that even reaches to all Gentiles. He is a light that is the Glory of Israel! This light was now just a baby, but this baby was the hope of the world...a new and wonderful reality!

Our Sixth Theme: Perspective

Perspective is a destination: Once we have been pierced with pain and sorrow, battled with uncertainty and having found a humble strength which unlocks our endurance, we finally approach our new reality - and perhaps for the first time in a long time - gain perspective. Perspective has a way of making that which seems overwhelming merely big and that which seems unattainable possible. Perspective is a good place to live...

We have to get our perspective and look towards hope. How do we get to hope? We have to learn to cope with the situation at hand.

Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus is saying we can come to him for rest. He understands the pain and sorrow and suffering we are experiencing. That is why he is here.

Matthew 11:2-6: Even John the Baptist had doubts. Jesus' life, death and sacrifice solved the world's problems - we just do not see the full results yet.

It takes time, but we need to put our sorrow into perspective.

Matthew 5:3-8: There is a promise to those poor in spirit and those who mourn. Jesus feels our pain - he lived it! He knows our weakness - he sacrificed for it! He embraces our despair - he died for it! He is the hope of the world, and as we approach Christmas let us truly appreciate his gift to us. The perspective Jesus gives us helps us to cope. It is not going to miraculously fix us, but it helps us to bear the burden. Hope is there when you are ready.

***So what hope can there be in the face of such tragedy?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions,
Think about it...!***