

## THE VALLEY OF WEEPING (PART 2)

BY GUY HAMMOND

Let's pick up where we left off in the first part of "The Valley of Baca." Its name literally means "The valley of the weeping." This valley for the Israelites in Judges 2 was a place of rebuke, conviction and repentance. It was necessary for them to weep. The valley of the weeping for the early Jewish pilgrim was a place that they had to travel in order to get to the city of God and find his temple. It was a necessary trip for them to make to see God.

The Valley of the weeping for you and I is a place that we must go through in order that we might get closer to God. The valley of the weeping is a lesson that you and I cannot be afraid of facing our sadness, our hidden sin, or the pain that comes from brokenness. With God, fewer statements are truer: no pain, no gain. In fact, this whole physical world and the physical bodies in which we live is not our real home for the Christian. Our real home is heaven with God.

It's like living in a motel. There is a bed to sleep on, a TV to watch, a few modern comforts, but it's just a motel. It's not home. So even though we must stay at the motel when we are traveling, it's not a place we *want* to stay at. It's just a stopover place that we have to stay at on our journey.

Like the motel, this world is a place we must stop at and stay for a while, until we check out and go home. It offers some nice conveniences at times, but for the most part, we're not really happy here, we don't really want to be here. It's expensive, it's uncomfortable, the people are often not very nice and the remote rarely works.

It would be strange if you loved staying in motels and didn't want to go home. Likewise, it would be strange if we loved this motel called life, when home is really with God.

Therefore, this life is just a place we are passing through. It's not supposed to be a place that we love so much we can't imagine leaving. In today's modern Christian circles, the idea that Christianity is a life of worry free living, filled with prayers of prosperity for physical wealth, and a pain free life, is a false and shallow religion. For the Christian, beneath the surface of our lives, there should be an ache that will not go away. It can be ignored, disguised, mislabeled or submerged by a torrent of activity, but it will not disappear. And for "good reason." We were designed to enjoy a *better* world than this.

An aching soul is evidence of our understanding that we are spiritual beings, in a physical and sinful world that is not our home. Since today the Valley of Weeping has become a figure of speech, rather than a place on the map, and I know that I have been there many times.

But I look back now over the past thirty years, and can clearly see that when I was going through my times of weeping is when I grew the most spiritually. I have been in the valley of bereavement from the death of father, and as I write this, my lovely wife Cathy has stage 4 brain cancer and has been given only a year to live. Trust me, there has never been a time in my life when the valley of weeping has been so real for me or my family. All of us have gone through this valley in one way or another.

But for the Christian, just when you think you can't take the pain any longer, Jesus calls out and says "*Do not let your hearts be troubled, in my Father's house there are many rooms.*"

There is the Valley of Disillusionment. But when my dreams have been broken and my heart along with it, when I no longer believed in myself and have felt like a failure, God has always called back *and said "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

There is the valley of repentance. This is a valley I know all too well. Repentance is always difficult. It requires you to have an honest and humble look at yourself. It requires a broken and contrite heart before God. It requires confession, openness, transparency and shame. True repentance requires pain and weeping.

Anyone who says they have dealt with their sin but has shed no tears, physically or emotionally in the effort has not dealt with their sin and truly repented.

I cannot relate to a man who has not been in the valley. I see people who seem to sail through their Christianity with little struggle and little temptation and I can only envy them, I think. Or maybe not! Come to think of it, people like that disturb me. They look so together. I don't know if they are really that successful or are in denial.

My valleys have included the crushing weight of bad news, the overwhelming feeling of being spiritually drained with no desire to carry on. In my valley I have wrestled with my own inability to handle tough decisions, I have fought nagging doubts, lived with fears and insecurities and worries about the future, and my own sinful, broken nature and the daily temptations I face. Valleys of weeping are actually good things to go through as a Christian because they actually force us to our knees in prayer and reliance on God.

*James 1:2*

*"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*

Show me a man or woman who has not struggled in the valley, and I'll show you a shallow Pharisee who is smug, self-righteous, fake and un-relatable. Show me a man or woman who while in the valley of the weeping has been forced to their knees in prayer, and forced to be humble with both God and man, and I'll show you a person who has produced those beautiful intangible qualities: *Humility, unselfishness, sympathetic understanding, patience, a non-judgmental heart, compassion for those hurt, and forgiveness.*

Thousands upon thousands of spiritually immature Christians enter the valley, but few ever leave it in the same condition. Let us remember that Jesus lived in this valley. It was because of his tears that he could show so much compassion to those who were crying. When he was in the garden of Gethsemane begging God to rescue him, he was in the valley of the tears. It is here that He thought of you and I as we go through our valley of weeping.

Finally, I think we ought to be encouraged by a preposition that the Psalmist uses both here in Psalm 23. "Though I walk *through the valley* of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." "*Through*" is the key word. In fact, it is the key word of the Christian life. If that seven-letter preposition were omitted from the text, life would be meaningless and futile. We don't walk "into" the valley, but we walk "through" the valley of shadows and tears. We walk into it, we travel through it, but with God, we always walk out of it on the other side.

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Thoughts presented in this devotional are taken from the book *MESSED UP: Proof That You're More to God Than Your Mistakes* by Guy Hammond and published by Illumination Publishers. The book is a companion to the documentary movie *FINDING GUY* by One Compass Media.