

A Place Like No Other

You are in a place that cannot be duplicated by any other experience.

The death of a loved one is unique. No matter what doctors or ministers tell you, nothing can prepare you for the chasm that is present when someone you loved is ripped out of your life. Whether it is sudden or a long time coming, you face that moment when for the first time you occupy space on a planet without them. They have been a part of you on a level so deep that words cannot explain it and emotions cannot find the proper response. There is a logical part of you that understands the reality, and another part that is born in the deepest heart, that screams out at the injustice of it all. You have lost other things. You have been hurt and broken by other experiences but nothing has ever come close to this experience. It is so final. So immense in its scope. It seems insurmountable. It is a new and unique place.

You are in a place that must be lived alone.

At least on the human level, as much as you try to find peace in others and in busyness, there is simply no place to hide from the pain of loss. You have moments of distraction, but the emptiness and the loneliness of your reality consumes at the end of each moment. You want desperately to drag someone in to share the pain, but this proves to be an impossible feat and you find that once again you are alone with your thoughts and memories. From deep within there are screams that demand comfort and no matter how loud they become, you find that at the end of each moment you are once again alone. It seems necessary. It proves inescapable. Alone is where you must be. It simply is.

You are in a place that others cannot understand.

Friends and family do their best to comfort, saying things they hope will be helpful. But the tidings always fall far short of their mark. They are so lost in efforts to comfort that they press and feel like saying something is better than saying nothing. This rarely ends well. Trite sayings that minimize the reality, clichés that raise more anger than comfort, sentiments that go almost unheard in their shallowness. These are the best efforts of those closest to us. They do mean well. They must be loved for this. But in the end they simply cannot understand.

You are in a place that is necessary.

Somewhere along the line you made the decision to love. It may have seemed natural and even simple at the time. I am sure that it was made in a wonderful way with warm and heartfelt feelings. However, we must understand that love, real love, comes at a great price. With each passing day, love requires more of us. This does not take away from the relationship. Just the opposite is true. It actually gives in great measure to both. In that giving you become part of one another, connected. No matter the relationship, when you love someone that connection is binding and lasting. So to lose someone to whom you were connected brings with it the pain that goes with loving. It is really quite unavoidable.

You are in a place that is temporary.

People use the phrase “get over it” a great deal. For example, “I wish they could get over it” or “how long until I get over it”. While you never “get over it” altogether, cliché as it sounds, time does heal. At least to a certain degree. I know many of you are hurting as you face all of the firsts. First Christmas, first anniversary, first birthday. These can be rough and painful. They dredge up the full measure of your loved one’s absence. They make you fully aware of what is missing.

The seconds, however, are not so bad. Grief handled in a fairly healthy way usually loses some of the painful intensity after a couple of years. As you get stronger, you are also growing in other areas of life. In other words, life does go on.

This time is also temporary on a different scale as well. As Christians, we know that death is not the final word. It is only a momentary set back in an eternal story, which leads us to our final place.

You are in a place that God has been through and redeemed.

More than anyone, God can be empathetic with where you are. He has not only been there; He was moved to choose to lose His Son for our sake. He is that friend that can be there when your soul is screaming into the night. He can hear, relate and move on your behalf. The wonderful part about God being in your story is that you get to walk through your grief and your hatred of death with the author of life. He is not just the God who created life in its original form, He is also the God who opened the door for eternal life. As much as we may hurt for those we loved, we as Christians have the reality that our people are better off now than they ever were here on Earth. If we can be honest in this moment, most of us would not bring them back and take them from the perfect existence they now enjoy. So we are brought face to face with the real issue. We simply miss them and that is perfectly alright.

Tonight, we miss them together. We cry together. We remember together. But we also have faith together that our loved ones are in wonderful hands. We are thankful tonight for a God who defeated the power of death and gave us instead the reality of resurrection. Not only do we believe that we will see God when we leave this life, we also hold on to the hope we will be reunited with those that were precious to us in this life.

Thank God for rewriting our broken story. Tonight, you and I are in a place that is wrapped in healing and peace. I invite you to walk out tonight, carry those amazing gifts with you as you go.