

March 9, 2025

# From Grief to Joy

Matthew 5:4; Luke 7:11-17

Darlene Larson, grief-loss coach and founder of Hearts With a Purpose, told God she was tired of living out the first part of John 10:10, which says, “The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy.” She wanted to live more of the second part where Jesus said he came “so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.”

In the space of three years, Larson had lost her father and youngest brother, but she was also living with a dreadful secret. She was in an emotionally abusive marriage. She wrote, “The longevity and the chronicity of the abuse pummeled me. The daily bullets of being ignored, negated, or criticized by the man [who] had vowed to love me were deathblows. I believed I had nothing to offer and could no longer learn. I felt purposeless.” But one day, she decided she had grieved long enough. It was time to seek joy. So she stood up for herself and got help.

It wasn’t a smooth path to joy. Within 40 days of her decision, Larson became spouseless, homeless, and childless (since her teenage children chose to move out). She also experienced bankruptcy. But she knew what she had to do: “I knew giving thanks was my next best step” ‘Give thanks in every situation because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus’ ” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Easier said than done, but Larson knew she had work to do. “My focus had to shift from the mess to God. My Savior. My Sustainer. My Deliverer. His faithfulness. His sovereignty. . . . In my little condo nest I spoke thanks and wrote thanks. Whenever I saw my three teens, I thanked God I could see them, even if it was only for an hour. I thanked God when each month’s condo rent was paid. I thanked God I was out of the abuse. . . . I thanked God I had a startup business. I thanked God I could begin to laugh again.”<sup>1</sup>

The prophet Isaiah promised that the Spirit of the Lord would always be with God’s people. Not only would they be comforted, but they would also be glad again. Their community would be whole again. In the face of individual grief, this verse might seem unfitting: “Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.” Gladness in the face of devastating loss? Grief is such a personal experience, and everyone deals with grief in their own way. I cling to the hopeful promise that God is with us and comforts us in our grief no matter how we feel or express it. In Matthew 5, Jesus promised more than comfort to the mourning; he promised full restoration.

God will restore us. Not to the persons we were before a traumatic loss, but to people who are healed and whole and glad again. In the depths of our grief, that can be a hard promise to hear. We might not even want to feel gladness. What if letting go of the pain of grief means that we are letting go of our loved ones or giving up our dreams? But God promises restoration, including keeping our loved ones close to our hearts, holding on to our dreams, or walking in the new paths God has planned for us.

God will restore the entire earth. The destruction, war, violence, and oppression that we grieve will all give way to God and God’s kingdom. In their place will be gladness. No matter what or how we grieve, God is with us.

1. What does your grief look like?
2. In times of grief and loss, how can you shift your focus from pain to gratitude?
3. Jesus promises restoration to those who grieve. How does this promise shape your understanding of God's presence in your suffering?

<sup>1</sup>From "Growing Joy," by Darlene Lawson, *Just Between Us*.

Adapted from *Daily Bible Studies*, Spring 2025, by Amy Sigmon (Cokesbury, 2024).