

January 15, 2022

Stephy's Place Reflection by Kevin Keelen

What a Bargain

Dear Friends,

Death has a way of forcing us to face the ULTIMATE questions-
the most important questions in life-

- What is life all about?
- Who is God?
- Is there a God?
- What is God up to?
- Why would God let this happen?
- Why now?
- Why not someone less good or kind?
- Why are we here? Is there a meaning to all this?
- Is death really the end?
- Is there something more?
- Where do we go after we die?

Every religion in the world wrestles with these questions.... All give their own response, theologies, belief systems, and reflections, but none

really give definitive answers.... After all, it is faith, and that's the way it is supposed to be. No definitive answers.

It certainly doesn't make it easy, and it is not easy. No matter what our belief system is, or if we have none at all, we can't get away from at least pondering the ultimate questions and wondering. But ultimately, no matter what churches and church leaders and religions may tell us, it is ultimately our own personal response to loss that matters. How does this impact me/you personally/in the recesses of our hearts and souls? Where is it all taking us?

This awful, unwanted, excruciating journey takes us on a very scary roller coaster ride, a ride none of us ever want to get on, and, to put it professionally, it sucks. The ride involves emotional upheaval, confusion, and incredible pain, and it can plunge us into depths of hopelessness and questioning like none we have ever encountered.

This is why many of us do some "bargaining" as is indicated in the classical 'stages' of grief. Bargaining is not talked about that much, it's usually a very personal, internal process/conversation, and quite often it happens before someone passes, especially if they are suffering a long and painful illness.

We do our share of bargaining for sure, and who can blame us? We offer to change just about anything about ourselves, our lifestyle, our prayer, or our interior and exterior life to save the one we love. Bargaining is normal, understandable and it's expected.

We also can do a lot of bargaining in our heads after someone passes, “*if only I had done this, I should have done that...* This is the torment of the *shoulda, woulda, couldas* with which we are most familiar. This is unfortunately one of the most excruciating parts of grief, as we keep rewinding what happened in our heads trying to get a different outcome. But alas, we know all too well, there is no rewind. But try telling that to the brain.... We have little choice but to let the *woulda, shoulda, couldas* run their course, and there is little we can do to turn it off. The needle needs to run through the vinyl before we begin to feel some relief and it begins to soften. The loss can remain unbelievable and unacceptable for a staggering amount of time, but my observation is that eventually this begins to quiet down, but on a different timeline for everyone, as everyone grieves differently.

If grief is a spiritual journey, and I truly agree it is, then it is in bargaining that the journey often begins. Quite often we need to reexamine, re-think, and re-interpret our understanding of God after a significant loss. If we have had inner conversations bargaining with God, and God does not comply with our loving and faithful request, it may force us to come to a new understanding of who God is or if we even believe. Even if we don't believe that God actually did take our loved one or caused his or her suffering, illness, or demise, we need to come to grips with why did God allow it to happen? Often faith can be deconstructed before it is reconstructed or rediscovered on this ‘spiritual journey’ called grief. And I certainly believe that God understands it,

and in fact I believe that if it helps us on this spiritual journey, - if it actually can help us in the healing process, then God welcomes it and blesses it. This has most certainly been my own personal experience in my grief and spirituality and my observation with too many people to count.

Wherever you are on this rollercoaster-ride from hell, please try to be patient with where you are, because wherever you are is exactly where you need to be. I know that may sound like semantics, but it is true. We may even get stuck on the tracks for a while, but even that is necessary for many of us. You may be bargaining or questioning or feeling hopeless, you may feel abandoned and quite lonely, but try to be patient with the fact that you are on this journey -you are in the rollercoaster car, you are strapped in tightly and it will be a very bumpy ride. But please be aware that you are not alone. Be aware that you still love and are loved. Be aware that this is survivable, and it is actually taking you somewhere... we just don't know and can't know where. Yet.

Peace and Serenity,

Kevin