

FALTERING FELLOWSHIPS: UNDERSTANDING COMMUNAL GRIEVING AND ITS CAUSES

Presented by Rev. Shawn P. Stapleton
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The author will explore the reality of "communal grief," a phenomenon that affects congregations following substantial changes in congregational life. This paper will offer a brief synopsis of the biblical and theological themes of grieving, and will differentiate between individual and communal grief. It is hoped that participants will be better equipped to determine whether issues within their local congregations are due to deeper communal grieving.

Introduction

Loss and change is an ongoing, life-long reality for all human beings, including people of faith. Try as we might to keep our lives governed by consistency, we are inevitably confronted by losses and changes big and small, whether in our own lives or in the lives of others. Loved ones die, children mature and leave home, neighborhoods change, and jobs change or are lost. These changes can be traumatic, but other changes cause grief as well: graduation from school, retirement, illness and recovery. Our lives are a part of the on-going history of God's creation, which is in constant change. Some may conclude that the human experience, like history, is just "one damned thing after another."¹ Authors Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson suggest each of us begins to experience loss and change from the moment he or she is born. The transition from the womb to autonomous life is traumatic, but necessary.² From that point forward, every person undergoes a series of attachments and separations, endings and beginnings, each episode carrying with it the potential for grief. "Just as there can be no life without

attachment, there can be no attachments without eventual separation and loss,” Mitchell and Anderson write. “There is no life without either attachment or loss; hence, there is no life without grief.”³ Another writer, whose own grieving process led him to the conclusion that “life is a veneer of order imposed upon a seething cauldron of chaos,” suggests that those who avoid grief “are less willing to make meaningful attachments or to love deeply.”⁴ Thomas Merton has a slightly different twist, suggesting that the more we try and avoid suffering, the more we suffer, because an increasing number of insignificant things cause us irritation. No matter how we look at it, grieving is an unavoidable part of life, and therefore, an unavoidable part of the Christian life.

If individuals grieve, then communities of individuals must be capable of grieving as well, offering a communal dynamic that can become systemic dysfunction unless it is addressed properly. This can be especially true within Christian communities, where members hear conflicting messages on grief and its place within the Christian life.

Biblical Understandings of Suffering

“Blessed are those who mourn,” Jesus tells his disciples in his “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5:3),⁵ just one of Jesus’ many proclamations that contradict the cultural “wisdom” of his day and our own. Within Jesus’ contemporary setting, the pronouncement must have been jarring, maybe even bordering on blasphemy. The thought of being blessed because of loss, death, illness or some other cause for grieving ran contrary to traditional Jewish theology, which maintained that such losses were divine retribution for perceived infractions against Yahweh, committed either by a person, a community, or the community’s ancestors. John 9:2ff has Jesus’ disciples asking whether it was the sins of a man who had been blind from birth or his parents that

caused his blindness. Joshua 7 illustrates a nation suffering for the sins of one person, while Genesis 18 shows God's willingness to *spare* a community from suffering based on the *righteousness* of a few. Of particular interest is Abraham's question in 18:23: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?", which might be altered to ask, "Will you destroy the entire family for the sins of one member?" when considering the story of Achan in the book of Joshua.

These are not mere proof-texts. In the newly-formed nation of Israel, God established that sins committed by priests – even when committed unintentionally – had communal consequences, bringing guilt upon the entire nation. Sins committed by leaders and other Israelites, however, only brought guilt to the one who committed the sin (Lev. 4:1ff.). When the monarchy of Israel was established, the sins of kings brought punishment on the nation (e.g. 1 Sam. 13) and also on themselves (e.g. 2 Sam. 11-12). Eventually, the nations of Israel and Judah would fall at the hands of the Babylonians because of the sins of the nation (Isa. 1, Jer. 2).

Sin was long considered to be the cause of individual or communal afflictions, from the very founding of the nation of Israel until the time of Jesus (John 9:2), and even into the early church. Paul chided Christians in Corinth for condoning sin, saying that the sin of one pollutes the many. "Do you not know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?" (1 Cor. 5:6). Here, Paul actually calls upon the church to grieve the sinful nature of the one member and to remove him from the fellowship in order that he might reform his ways and return to the holy communion of Corinth (1 Cor. 5:2). Individual sinfulness is cause, then, for communal grief.

If sin is the cause of affliction, and grief is the response to affliction, then grief is ultimately the response to sin. To proclaim “blessed are those who mourn” meant the removal of sin from the equation, discounting generations of Jewish theology, stripping God of God’s divine authority over creation. But Jesus restores that authority with the second half of the pronouncement: “for they will be comforted.” This second half of the Beatitude offers a promise – one that points to comfort in this world and the next. This is comfort that only God can provide, since God alone is ruler of heaven and earth. The chasm between earth and heaven is unfathomable, and God alone bridges both realms. Jesus says that those who suffer afflictions are favored by God, not cursed (though we must be careful to make sweeping generalizations, as Acts 5 – the story of Ananias and Sapphira – reminds us). The sign of God bridging the gap would be found in the blind as they receive their sight; in the deaf as they regained their hearing; in the mute as their tongues were loosened; and in the paralyzed as their ability to walk was restored, the prophets foretold (e.g. Isa. 61). The covenant of condemnation and isolation had been replaced by the covenant of forgiveness and inclusion. Our afflictions are not outward signs of a sinful soul; but the way we react to our afflictions may be.

Yet, for the grieving today, the promise of comfort may feel empty. Where is the divine comfort when a loved one dies? Where is the comfort of God when the loneliness and disorientation sets in, as neighbors cease delivering covered dishes, and family members return to their homes and their lives? Where is the fulfillment of the promise when society continues on as if the loved one had never lived, while the psychological world of the grief-stricken seems frozen and cloistered? Scripture tells us our comfort lies in the promises of God. Nowhere is this made clearer than in the psalms.

“Why Have You Forsaken Me?”

“How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?” “Hear, O Lord, my cry for mercy.” “I cry out ... but you do not answer”.⁶ In the Psalter the cries of those in pain and mourning are heard directly as the afflicted plead with God. In Psalm 90, Moses pleads with God to allow the people to live the same amount of time in comfort and joy as God allowed them to live in affliction. “May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us,” he concludes. Psalm 102 makes no pretense about the depth of the composer’s grief. He has lost his appetite, and wept many tears (vv. 4-5, 9). His affliction and grieving were cause for discord with others (v. 8). But the psalm transitions from grief to hope – not a hope of immediate relief, but one of eschatological hope, in which relief will come for future generations (vv. 15-22).

This language does not come naturally today. People of faith seek instant relief from pain and discomfort, and if they have not developed a lifestyle centered on communing with God, such prayers will not come naturally when they are most needed.⁷

Eugene Peterson writes,

The people in our congregations are, in fact, out shopping for idols. They enter our churches with the same mind-set in which they go to the shopping mall, to get something that will please them or satisfy an appetite or need. ... The people who gather in our congregations want help through a difficult time; they want meaning and significance in their ventures. They want God, in a way, but certainly not a ‘jealous God,’ not the ‘God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Mostly they want to be their own God and stay in control but have ancillary idol assistance for the hard parts ...⁸

The psalms also offer a word of hope for those who grieve. Psalm 23 tells us we walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death. Psalm 34:4 proclaims, “I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.” Psalm 69:29 expresses grief, but 69:33 expresses hope: “I am in pain and distress ... The Lord hears the needy.”

Scripture gives us the theology of the biblical historians and the prophets, for whom the sin/suffering narrative is central, as well as the story of Job, with conflicting ideas of why Job is made to suffer. It is important to explore these texts to discover the biblical understanding of how pain, loss and suffering are manifest within an individual or a community. Scripture also shows us the responses of those who are grieving: bewilderment, anger, isolation, and fear of abandonment.⁹

The Suffering of Job

Job is described in scripture as an upright man who is fully and faultlessly devoted to God (Job 1:1-5, 8). Without warning, catastrophe strikes: Job is the victim of one calamity after another, stripping him of all his earthly comforts, his health, and even his children and wife. The reader knows that these things occur as a test of Job's faith, a kind of other-worldly game of chance between Satan, who believes he can turn Job away from God, and Yahweh, who believes Job will remain faithful. Job's friends gather around him in an effort to help him understand his recent afflictions, but Job's suffering and grief lead him to proclaim that he has been progressively cut off from God's presence:

↓ (Job 7:8-10): *"The eye that now sees me will see me no longer; you (Eliphaz) will look for me, but I will be no more. As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to (Sheol) does not return. He (Job) will never come to this house again; his place will know him no more."*

Job is anticipating that the next step in his suffering will be

↓ (Job 9:11): *"When he passes me, I cannot see him, when he goes by, I cannot perceive him."*

God is still in Job's midst, but Job has lost the ability to discern God's presence.

↓ (Job 13:24): *"Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy?"*

(Job 23:3): *"If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling!"*

Job believes God is actively hiding from him; the relationship between Job and God has been severed.

↓ (Job 24:12): *“The groans of the dying rise from the city, and the souls of the wounded cry out for help. But God charges no one with wrong-doing.”*
Job believes God has actually stopped paying attention to him, and to all those who suffer. Job has moved from perceiving a general separation from God to a separation that was initiated by God – the ultimate loss for the person of faith.

Job, described as “blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8), has undergone substantial losses and changes, and as a result feels separated from God, a separation which seems to increase with the passage of time. Job 23:3 shows Job beginning the downslide of hopelessness, which hits bottom in 24:12, where Job blames God for not only his suffering, but the suffering of “the city.” Job’s grief has gone from an individual experience to a projected experience, in which Job assumes that the suffering he is experiencing is part of a communal abandonment by God. He has suffered tremendous loss and change in his life, and now has grown so despondent that he begins to blame God for all that ails “the city.”

At the root of Job’s grief is his conclusion that God has broken the covenant relationship with him. Since the time of Abraham, God’s people have relied on that covenant relationship, agreeing to live their lives in accordance with God’s Law in response to God’s initiation of the relationship with their ancestors and God’s continued presence in their midst. There was no more painful punishment than to be cut off from God. The covenant relationship is the hope to which God’s chosen people, and eventually all of humanity, is invited to cling. Job slowly loses that hope.

In response to his losses, Job begins grieving with self-loathing (3:1ff.), then tries bargaining with God (6:2ff.). He then seems to resign himself to the reality of his situation (9:2ff.), then gets angry with his friends (12:2ff, 16:2ff), and with God (27:2ff), eventually proclaiming that God has not only abolished the covenant with him

personally, but with all those who suffer. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, declare any further discourse with Job as futile, saying Job now thinks he is “righteous in his own eyes” (32:1). Job, who had been declared “blameless and upright” at the beginning of the saga, now seems to have lost his humility and adopts a position of self-righteousness.

This is not surprising, since those who grieve often revert back to emotionally simpler times. This human impulse is a protective mechanism, the psychological equivalent of a turtle’s retreat into its shell.¹⁰ It was in that crucial moment that God appears, proclaiming himself as *El Shaddai*, God Almighty – in this case more adequately rendered as God of All Sufficiency.¹¹ Job had been stripped of all the things on which he relied for comfort, and in the absence of those things, Job began leaning on himself. By doing so, he created a chasm between himself and God, which grew wider with each passing dialogue. Job needed a community around him that would guide him and uphold him in the midst of his suffering and grieving, continually pointing him back to the God of All Sufficiency. Without structured and intentional assistance, Job drifted further and further from God, and the content of Job’s character deteriorated as a result.

Ignoring the Wounds of the Community

Of all the prophets, Jeremiah gives us the clearest glimpse into the result of whole nations rebelling against God. The kingdom of David had divided many years before, and the northern portion of the land God had given to his people was now occupied by the armies of Babylon. God told the prophet that the southern half of the once-powerful kingdom, and particularly Jerusalem, would fall to the Babylonians as well. While a chorus of false prophets lulled the people into a sense of complacency with promises of peace, Jeremiah’s words fell on deaf ears. In Jer. 6:13-19 God pronounces judgment on

the false prophets, who have deceived the people, rather than delivering the word of the Lord. “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). The guilt God pronounces extends also to the people who listened to those false prophets. The “wound” of the people is their breaking of the covenant of faithfulness to God and God’s law; the failure of the false prophets was to first inflict, then perpetuate that wound. The people prefer the “wide gate” and the “broad road” to which Jesus refers, a way that makes no demands, and comforts them with words the “their itching ears want to hear,” according to Paul (2 Tim. 4:3). One commentator says it this way:

Men (*sic*) do not relish being disturbed. The accustomed is the comfortable; the believed is the congenial; and ‘what I don’t know doesn’t hurt me.’ Jeremiah found communication difficult. Exhortation beat helplessly on the closed mind, the uncircumcised heart; *musar*, God-sent discipline, went unheeded; and even threats proved futile. Jeremiah’s experience with his people taught him that he could not frighten them into virtue. ... The people heard the words of the prophets who prophesied ‘good.’ But however loudly Jeremiah protested, the people could not hear him – and scarcely a ripple disturbed their bog.¹²

At the foundation of the message of the prophets is that God’s people stand condemned for breaking that covenant. At various times through their history, they devoted themselves to other “gods.” They abandoned the covenant, intentionally severing their relationship with God. As a result suffering, loss and change, all come directly from the hand of God as punishment for the people allowing themselves to become like other nations (Jer. 11:10). God’s people experienced the loss of military battles, the loss of prestige (perceived or real), and ultimately the loss of the land as God scatters the people (e.g. Jer. 9:16, Neh. 1:8, Ezek. 20). All this, God says through the prophets, is due to the *communal* sins of the people, not only of the existing generation, but also of generations that preceded them (though the Mosaic Law is ambiguous on this point).¹³ Could it be

that, just as humanity's worst torment is the moment when God seems to no longer listen, so also God is tormented when God's people no longer listen?

Job's suffering and grief begins with an individual test of faithfulness, but progresses toward communal sinfulness in the guise of Job's suffering under Satan and the unwitting collusion of his friends. For Job, God gives a reminder in dramatic fashion that God is the God of all ages and provides all sufficiency ("*El Shaddai*"). The prophet Jeremiah deals with a people who suffer communally because they sin communally. Such is the nature of the faith community, whether the size of nations or of small house churches: the individual impacts the communal, and the communal impacts the individual.

Vicarious suffering: Jesus' pain and grieving on behalf of the community

So, suffering and grief occurs both individually and communally in scripture. In addition, and perhaps most important theologically for Christians, is the notion that Jesus fulfilled Jewish prophecy by experiencing individual suffering and grief *on behalf* of the community. Isaiah's "servant songs" portray the coming of a leader who will take the sins of the nation on himself, bearing the atonement necessary to forgive not only those sins committed in the nation's past and present, but also those of future generations (e.g. Isaiah 53, esp. v. 12).¹⁴

In the fulfilling of this prophecy, Jesus lives out both the joy and sorrow of his calling. Jesus knows the fate that awaits Jerusalem and its residents as a result of the leaders' rejection of Jesus as the "capstone" or "cornerstone" of humanity forgiven (Luke 20:17ff; Eph. 2:19-20; 1 Pet. 2:4-8). The sins of the leaders will be visited upon all who follow them, just as forgiveness of Christ will be visited upon all who follow Him.

In this way we proclaim Jesus as the one who fulfilled the “suffering servant” prophecy of Isaiah, especially within the theology of western Christianity.¹⁵ In the same way as a “scapegoat” was needed to atone for the sins of Israel (Lev. 16:6ff.), Western Christianity has held that Jesus atoned for the sins of humanity: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isa. 53:4-5).

However, that vicarious atonement also introduced the theological construct of reconciliation: Through Christ, humanity has been reconciled to God, and has been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18), about which I will say more later.

GRIEF AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Each Sunday we gather in what is supposed to be a combined remembrance of Jesus’ suffering and a celebration of Jesus’ resurrection, which culminate in thanksgiving to God for extending even to us the forgiveness achieved through Jesus. However, those who stay with a church long enough and are willing to become involved in the church’s ministries find out all too quickly that sinfulness still abounds in these communities of worship. Experience tells us that divisiveness, conflict (as opposed to disagreements), strife and brokenness are all still present, even in the communion of saints.

However, much of this discord can be attributed to a communal, systemic grief within the congregation. Communal transitions, such as the loss of a pastor or division in the church, can send the entire fellowship into a state of grieving. What do we (as the wider Christian body) do when, for instance, a pastor or member of the church behaves

so badly that the congregation can no longer focus on God in the midst of that person? How do the people of God find blessedness in a bruised and broken fellowship, when attending worship means sitting in tension just a few feet from a man or woman who has caused them pain, or listening to a pastor whose personality and/or behavior runs contrary to what he or she preaches in the pulpit? Each Sunday spent in such a fellowship resurrects painful emotions, often until a kind of numbness drapes over those raw nerves as a protective mechanism.

Jaco Hamman, assistant professor of pastoral care and counseling at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI, acknowledges that pastors and congregations suffer hurts, pains, disappointments, feelings of abandonment, and other afflictions and, like grieving individuals, they need to *intentionally* grieve those afflictions.¹⁶ German pastor/theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer would agree. Christians, as followers of Christ, must do what Jesus did: Bear the grief and suffering of others, no matter the cost.

Bonhoeffer writes:

The disciple-community does not shake off sorrow as though it were no concern of its own, but willingly bears it. And in this way they show how close they are to the bonds which bind them to the rest of humanity. But at the same time they do not go out of their way to look for suffering, or try to contract out of it by adopting an attitude of contempt or disdain. They simply bear the suffering which comes their way as they try to follow Jesus Christ, and bear it for *His* sake.¹⁷

In other words, for the Christian community, suffering and grief are to be *expected*. Such suffering and grief come with the blessings of following a crucified Lord. Such is the discord between what we expect from the church (healing, grace, unconditional love, divine community, etc.), and what we sometimes actually experience. Bonhoeffer calls those expectations “wish dreams.” He writes,

By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. God is not a God of the emotions but the God of truth. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it. The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community the better for both. A community which cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists upon keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community.¹⁸

Diagnosis of such afflictions and grief cannot happen without divine discernment. Jesus knew the afflictions of those he healed (and even those to whom he proclaimed forgiveness), but the contemporary church and her spiritual leaders often have not been blessed with that divine insight. This is especially true for those who are afflicted by grief. Grieving may cause individual members of the congregation – or groups of members – to react to a loss or change by showing a decreased willingness to participate in programming, for instance. Spiritual leaders of the congregation may chastise those who react in this manner without recognizing grief as the underlying cause. If the decreased activity also changes the nature of relationships within the congregation, the congregation may see an increasing amount of dissension or even divisiveness among those who are grieving. Grief becomes a disease (or dis-ease) within the “the body of Christ,” and without intervention, it could prevent the body from attaining true emotional, spiritual, physical and relational health. The causes are not always dramatic: introducing a new hymnal or version of scripture, a move from one building to another, a change in leaders, a transition in the congregation's status in the community, a transition from financial security to financial strain, or traumatic events like a congregational split can all cause some level of congregational grief.¹⁹

German Theologian Jürgen Moltmann suggests that a Christian community *must* grieve, because the Christian community is always changing, and often counter-cultural, leading to a sense of communal discord as the community tries to reconcile the reality of this world with the hope-full wholeness of heaven. Moltmann writes, “That is why faith, whenever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience. It does not calm the unquiet heart, but is itself the unquiet heart in man (*sic*). Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it.”²⁰ To be a follower of Christ, in a community of followers of Christ, means to exist and minister within worldly reality while always looking toward the One who transcends death, and therefore, grief and suffering. He wrote:

To believe does in fact mean to cross and transcend bounds, to be engaged in an exodus. Yet this happens in a way that does not suppress or skip the unpleasant realities. Death is real death, and decay is putrefying decay. Guilt remains guilt and suffering remains, even for the believer, a cry to which there is no ready-made answer. Faith does not overstep these realities into a heavenly utopia, does not dream itself into a reality of a different kind. It can overstep the bounds of life, with their closed wall of suffering, guilt and death, only at the point where they have in actual fact been broken through. It is only in following the Christ who was raised from suffering, from a god-forsaken death and from the grave that it gains an open prospect in which there is nothing more to oppress us, a view of the realm of freedom and of joy.²¹

When the “body of Christ” is healthy, it may indeed experience this lack of oppression and catch a glimpse of “the realm of freedom and of joy” to which Moltmann points. But the “body of Christ” remains a human endeavor, within which the human will is often powerfully at work. C.S. Lewis suggests that in order to transform the congregation into a healing place for individuals, the “body of Christ” as a whole must completely surrender to God in all things, just as the Son completely surrendered to the Father in all things – a difficult task under the best of circumstances. “In the world as we now know it, the problem is how to recover this self-surrender,” Lewis writes, harkening back to the

creation of humanity, which fully surrendered to God before the Fall. Now we are “rebels who must lay down our arms” but are almost always unwilling to do so, which means the pain of the cure for our brokenness may be more painful than the brokenness itself. “To render back the will which we have so long claimed for our own, is in itself, wherever and however it is done, a grievous pain,” he admits.²²

So, to suffer and grieve in Christian community is not only likely, but necessary. To echo Granger Westberg, Paul’s injunction to the Christians at Thessalonica (and to us) was not to cease grieving, but to cease grieving “like the rest of men, who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). Our call is not to abandon our natural human impulse to grieve in the midst of loss and change, nor is it to quash the grieving of others. Instead, the duty of “the body of Christ” is to attain unity amidst its diversity, and to facilitate spiritual growth and healing among its members by finding the ways in which God is actively involved in the loss and in the grieving process. The key to fulfilling this duty is “intentionality,” especially as it pertains to the experience of grief in Christian community.

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Notes

- ¹ Attributed to Henry Ford in an editorial published in the July 22, 2003 edition of the Montreal (Quebec) Gazette, accessed at http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.dbq.edu:2048/us/inacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T7876044934&format=GNBFI&sort=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T7876044938&cisb=22_T7876044937&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8355&docNo=1 on Nov. 13, 2009.
- ² Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs : Resources for Pastoral Care*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 20.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 21.
- ⁴ S. Bruce Vaughn, "Recovering Grief in the Age of Grief Recovery," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 13, no. 1 (2003): 37, 39.
- ⁵ All Bible references are drawn from the New International Version © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society, unless otherwise noted.
- ⁶ From Psalms 137:4, 140:6, 22:2 respectively.
- ⁷ Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 80-81.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Mitchell and Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs : Resources for Pastoral Care*, 61-82. Mitchell and Anderson provide a more extensive list of reactions and an excellent analysis of each.

- ¹⁰ Ibid., 22.
- ¹¹ R. Laird Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 906.#2333
- ¹² Sheldon H. Blank, *Jeremiah : Man and Prophet*, 1st ed. (Cincinnati [Ohio]: Hebrew Union College Press, 1961), 205, 07.
- ¹³ See Jer. 32, Isaiah 65 and Daniel 9. However, it should be noted that while Leviticus 26:27-39 echoes God's intention to punish the people severely by allowing them to "waste away" in foreign lands as punishment for their sins and the sins of the ancestors, Deut. 24:16 says, "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin."
- ¹⁴ I recognize that Chapters 40-55 are largely considered to have been written by a disciple of the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, maybe sometime during the 7th century BC. For the sake of readability, I use the name "Isaiah" here and throughout this section to refer to the writer of this section of the compilation known in the Judeo-Christian scriptures as the book of the book of "Isaiah."
- ¹⁵ See Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship : Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2008). Webber offers a very succinct comparison between Western Christianity's atonement narrative and the Eastern Orthodox incarnational narrative. The West follows a rubric of creation → sin → redemption, while the East sees the Christian narrative as creation → incarnation → re-creation.
- ¹⁶ Jaco J. Hamman, *When Steeples Cry : Leading Congregations through Loss and Change* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 23.
- ¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. (New York, Macmillan Edition: Rev. [i.e. 2d] & unabridged ed. containing material not previously translated., 1959).
- ¹⁸ ———, *Life Together*, 1st ed. (New York,: Harper, 1954), 27.
- ¹⁹ Hamman, *When Steeples Cry : Leading Congregations through Loss and Change*, 50-59.
- ²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope : On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 21.
- ²¹ Ibid., 19-20.
- ²² C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York,: Touchstone, 1996), 81.