

Hasel, Frank M. *Love Is! A Journey of Grief, Grace, and Gratitude*. Eugen, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2024. Xvii + 111 pp. Paperback, USD 19:00. ISBN 978-1666782370

Book Review

Frank M. Hasel is an author and theologian. He is an associate director at the Biblical Research Institute of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Silver Spring, Maryland, USA. Dr. Hasel has authored several articles and two books—*Longing for God: A Bible-Prayer Journal* (2017) and *Living for God: Reclaiming the Joy of Christian Virtue* (2020).

His 2024 book, *Love Is! A Journey of Grief, Grace, & Gratitude*, tells the story of his love for his wife, Ulrike, and the devastating loss and grief he experienced after she passed away from breast cancer in 2009. He shares how God's transformative power sustained him during this time and how, even in the midst of grief, he found reasons to be grateful. The book has fifteen chapters.

The book can be divided into two parts: Chapters one to six, where Hasel discusses the difficulty and uniqueness of grief, and Chapters 7-14, where he discusses his responses to the reality of death and grieving. Chapter 15 presents the epilogue.

In chapter one, Hasel states, "our grief is ferociously individual, and each person's suffering has its own distinctive qualities" (1). Hasel also acknowledges the difficulty of accepting the reality of death and grief. Still, it is heartening that grief also brings some form of fellowship when we realize that others grieve and ache with us. In Chapter 3, Hasel affirms human vulnerability and feebleness, the uncertainty of life, and the crippling fear of the unknown in crises such as severe ill-health. But trying times might also teach us the virtue of waiting. He asserts that "because humans exist in time, waiting is part of our identity, our story, and our history.... There is no historical succession without waiting. The person who lives—waits! The person who waits—lives!" (10). Further, Hasel argues that this moment of waiting "presents to us with a spiritual choice" (10). One aspect of this spiritual choice is to become negative in

our thoughts and actions, and doubt God's goodness. The other is to grow our understanding and relationship with God and seek His strength, grace, and wisdom.

In Chapter 4, Hasel correctly states that our perspective of God in moments of crisis can mitigate the thought that bad things cannot happen to good people. We realize that in our fallen world, because of sin and its inexpressible consequences on human earthly existence, even the faithful and righteous can suffer unexplainable painful experiences and even die young. But faith can assure us that "God is good and does not delight in human suffering and pain" (23).

A very insightful chapter is Chapter 6, where Hasel discusses the facets of feelings of loss and the grief of a loved one. He states that the magnitude of such a feeling is like "life itself is ripped out of me" (33). This exhausting experience manifests as loneliness, intense pain, anxiety, fear, anger, disorientation, uncertainty, insecurity, and meaninglessness. Nonetheless, faith and trust in God can help us to endure and handle the situation in the midst of sometimes human well-intended but often limited counsels, opinions and actions. Faith can also help us deal with personal frustrations, loss, pains and anger, grief and loneliness, emptiness. Faith in God can help us "face the future with courage" (38).

I consider Chapters 7-14 the second part of Hasel's book. In my view, this section deals with the seemingly negative impact of the death of his spouse on him and responses to death, grief, and grieving. In Chapter 7, Hasel notes on the one hand, many human scientific and medical quests to extend lives here on earth, and on the other hand, the attitude of suppressed lament and grief by Christians. While the former wants to delay and deny death, the latter pretends to hide the hurt of the facets and feelings of grief caused by death—a principal effect of the injustice of sin and the Fall. But death is contrary to the character and plan of God. Death as a present reality and part of human experience causes pain, separation, and disrupts human relationships. But how Christians ultimately "relate to death and dying should indicate to others that death is not the last horizon for us... we have a hope that resonates

in us, a hope that goes beyond the grave” (45). In Chapter 8, Hasel discusses the impacts of death, particularly on him. These include loneliness, envy, hopelessness, lack of security, relational riddle, change in thought patterns, questions about God and the future, and changes in social identity. In discussing the challenge of envy, he states, “envy erects walls that separate us from each other and ultimately even God. We can become prisoners of our own feelings of deprivation” (57). Perhaps the profound thing in dealing with the difficult and varied experiences and situations that arise from the death of a loved one is the question Hasel poses: “What was my faith worth, if it was not able to stand its ground authentically in a situation where it is needed most?” (60). In Chapter 9, Hasel argues that, although one can still find happiness in moments of grief, grieving is not just a scheduled event that terminates after a period of time. It is a process that requires time. We grieve because we value the person we have lost, and not because we are inconsolable. Grief is an expression of love, because “genuine love... does not end” (70). Chapter 10 focuses on the lessons learned by Hasel following the death of his spouse. These include accepting what he calls “helpful help” from people, accepting the reality of death, living by faith empowered by God’s grace, and the hope of the future resurrection. He also writes that, while living with the loss of the dead, a spouse could learn to find his/her ultimate identity in God as a widower or widow.

Chapter 11 counsels on cherishing the memories of love shared with the beloved dead and places hope in the resurrection. Chapters 12 and 13 are devoted to advice to those who comfort the bereaved, and provide some suggestions and how best to do so. Chapter 14, the major concluding chapter, deals principally with gratitude. Hasel opines that one major step toward healing is living a life of gratitude for the time we had with the dead and the people around us. Gratitude helps us move forward instead of dwelling on the past.

In his book *Love Is! A Journey of Grief, Grace, & Gratitude*, Frank Hasel invites readers to share in his struggles to understand the ill health of his wife and the reality of pain and grief caused

by death even for the faithful. He also gives very worthy insights on how to deal with grief in God and the hope of the future. It is a story of the transformative grace of God who sustains in moments of grief and the life of gratitude to God. Indeed, if one would recommend a book to someone emotionally battered by significant loss, this book provides useful insight into what he called “helpful help.”

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