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Grief

by William P. Wilson, M.D.

-- Commentaries from past newsletters --

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Death is one of the common ventures in the lives of all humans. The others are birth, marriage and work. Our response to the death of loved ones called grief is a common life experience. Tonight we were having dinner with some friends who commented that their parents kept losing the friends they made in the retirement community where they lived, and how discouraged they were about the losses. I have lectured on the subject many times, but I have not discussed grief in my newsletters. I was reminded that I should finally write about it when two of my most beloved brothers in Christ have died in the recent past. The most recent has been Richard Thomas SJ, a Jesuit priest friend of mine. Rick was one of the most Christlike of all my friends. Only Dr. Ken McAll who died in 2000 came close to being as godly as Rick was. Of all the people who carried out Christ's commandments, Rick was without doubt one of the most obedient.

I first met Rick at the Charismatic Concerns Committee (CCC) in Glencoe, MO, in the early 70's. The CCC met there for a number of years and it was in that meeting that our friendship was forged. When I met him I immediately realized that he walked in the Spirit. There was an aura of Christlikeness about him that drew you to him. Rick was from Florida, and although I never knew what

prompted him to go into the priesthood, a dramatic change occurred in his career after he attended a class reunion in New Orleans at his seminary. He had a friend named Al Cohen to whom he was close. At the reunion Al invited Rick to a prayer meeting. He told me that he did not want to go, but went after Al insisted that he come. In the meeting they asked to pray for him so he let them. They laid hands on him and prayed but nothing happened. He had a headache so he went back to his room and crawled in bed. He was awakened in the wee hours of the morning and found the room filled with a brilliant blue light. He was immersed in God's love. His life was dramatically changed by what he knew was a visitation by God.

Rick had earlier been assigned to Our Ladies' Youth Center in El Paso, TX, and was beginning to take over as administrator of the place. Before he went to the meeting he had a staff of several psychologists and social workers. Now being a changed man, he was told by the Lord on his way home on the plane, to terminate their employment. He was also told to go home and return all the

money the United Fund had given him. I think he told me it was a six figure number of dollars. I may have exaggerated the amount, but it was considerable. Rick obediently did as the Lord instructed him. Then he asked the Lord what he was to do next. His next assignment was to go on the streets and preach salvation. He thought that Catholic priests didn't usually do such things, but he was obedient, and when he began preaching people got saved. Soon he had a group of people who prayed and worshiped with him. They also were given roles in the ministry. From the very beginning he had his people involved. As a matter of fact, they did the ministering.

Rick took the Bible seriously and wanted to carry out Christ's commandments so he decided to take Matthew 23 seriously. He had already proclaimed the Gospel and began to pray for healing of the sick, and unhesitatingly acted on Christ's commandment to cast out demons. He knew the Mexicans to whom he was ministering had been into animistic religion so there would be those who were demonized. Rick began to do spiritual warfare and deliverance. This was never a big part of his ministry, but it was essential because he needed spiritual immunity for himself and his people. It was, however, when seeking a way to celebrate the birth of Jesus that they decided at Christmas to feed the hungry in the Juarez, Mexico garbage dump. It was then that God began to do signs and wonders in his ministry. The story as recorded in Miracles in El Paso and told to me personally went as follows. When Rick asked his congregation what they should do for Christmas, one of his converts, a mail carrier, suggested that they feed the scavengers in the Juarez garbage dump across the border. They pooled their resources and cooked up enough food for 150 people. They did not know how many to expect, but they thought what they had would be sufficient.

They took their tortillas, beans, tomatoes, and lettuce, as well as 2 1/2 hams and drove their truck and people out to the dump. They set up tables, put the food out and called the people to come and have Christmas dinner. Three hundred and fifty people showed up. Realizing that they did not have enough food for the people who were there, they talked it over and decided to feed them until they ran out of food. When they got through they had fed all the people and had as much food as they started with. The food had been multiplied. They then took what they had left over and fed the children in several orphanages.

In time they decided to set up a food bank as a permanent ministry. This too was enormously successful. Food and money have been donated to maintain a constant flow of food to the poor. It was not that they could feed everyone who wanted food, but they fed many. Importantly, everyone who got food had to give a day's work in return. (Remember that the Bible said if you don't work you don't

eat.) In time they added a clothing bank and bought a water truck to supply water to the people since the supply in most places was dispensed in the poorer

sections of town through a single faucet for an entire neighborhood.

If you have studied your Bible, you remember that Jesus told us to not only feed the hungry, clothe the naked and give water to the thirsty, but also visit the sick and prisoners. Rick then decided to begin a mental hospital and jail ministry. He had by now involved an increasing number of his converts in ministry so he took them with him to pray for the mentally ill and to preach to the prisoners in the Juarez city jail. The routine was as follows. They would go to the jail and take food with them to feed the prisoners. The evangelist who was a layperson with a powerful witness went into the two main holding rooms and presented the Gospel. The first time I went the evangelist was a former border runner of drugs and money for the Mexican Mafia. He was a powerful speaker and many prisoners came to Christ in both rooms. Rick was not with us. All the while there were a number of men and women in the hall praying for the evangelist while he was preaching. I was amazed at the results of his preaching. After he had preached in the first room the prisoners in small groups were taken into a kitchen where they were served the food we had brought. The evangelist was preaching in the second room again with the same results. They too were fed after a number of them had given their lives to Christ.

Then we went to a room in the basement where there were twelve male homosexual transvestite prostitutes. Again the evangelist preached and all of them gave their lives to Christ. They were then told that they were new persons, and told to take off their clothes. They were redressed in men's clothes. One guy said that he would be embarrassed to be naked in front of us. The evangelist asked him why. "After all we are all men in here."

"Oh yes, I forgot," said the man. Lastly, a barber cut their hair. After talking to

them about living a new life we left. They were revisited later I was told and an effort made to disciple them.

Finally, we went to the juvenile detention center. There, after the children viewed the Jesus film, a 14 year old female evangelist evangelized the children and prayed for them to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When we got to the room where she and the children were meeting, we found them all arranged in a rosette around her resting in the Spirit. One of them was faking it because I saw him peeking at us, but the rest were really spiritually slain.

In the mental hospital we went from cell to cell to pray for the patients. Our healer was a woman named Candellaria. She did all the praying. As we went through the wards she would first fog the room with holy water, then she would put some blessed salt in the patient's mouth and give the patient a squirt of water from the spray bottle of holy water. Then she would anoint them with oil and pray. We followed this routine for a while until in time we came to a patient who was obviously a catatonic schizophrenic. He had classic "waxy flexibility" i.e, when you put him in a position he would hold it until someone put him in another. While

we were preparing to pray for him, I had a discernment that he was demon possessed. I told Candellaria and in her prayer she cast out his demons. As I watched, two of them came out and were carried off in the air. One consisted of six human legs arranged spider like. The other was gargoylish. Neither was like anything that I had seen before. When we came back to his cell we found him drinking from a gallon jug of holy water and eating a meal the nurse had brought him. He was still schizophrenic but responded to medication and eventually went home.

These ministry episodes took place during the six days I was there, but the highlight of my visit was the prayer meeting on Wednesday night. We all gathered in an upstairs meeting hall around six o'clock and had some food. There were old people, middle aged people, young people, and children all sitting on the floor. At the front of the room was a table with the elements for the Eucharist. The meeting began with music. They had several guitars, a guitaron and some maracas that were well played and the people really got into the worship. They clapped, danced, shouted and sang as the tempo picked up. Occasionally they would stop to catch their breath and pray. This went on until about 1 PM when Rick celebrated Mass. Little kids were sleeping all around the room, but exhausted older participants eagerly partook of the sacrament. Then people began drifting out, and in short order the room was empty. I have never been to a prayer meeting that was like that except at Rick's place. It was the same on my second visit.

Some years later I went out to visit Rick again. On this occasion I was doing a three day personal prayer retreat at the ranch he had up in New Mexico. I was

doing this since I had never done one and wanted to see what it would be like. Even so, I took part in the activities of the center. The most memorable part of this second trip was our visit to the jail. On my previous visit as the evangelist preached there was a demonic looking guy who unnerved me. He circled me constantly during the time we were in the room. I vowed that it would not happen this time. We had a different evangelist on this visit and when I asked him what he wanted me to do he told me to pray for him to be effective. I decided to lean against the wall while I prayed. He began his sermon and I began to pray. I ran out of words to say in English so I was praying in tongues with my eyes closed when I suddenly saw in my mind's eye six angels in the air above the scene in front of me. They were young muscular men who wore iridescent white robes with belts around their midriff. They were standing at parade rest with their long swords touching the ground in front them. Their hands rested comfortably on the hafts. I noted that the hafts of their swords were undecorated. They were attentively surveying the scene. I opened my eyes and they were still there. They did not disappear when I closed and opened my eyes several times. They disappeared when we left the room.

When we went into the smaller room three new ones showed up and again I perceived them as before. They stayed until we left.

Reflecting on the experience, I realized that what I was seeing were eidetic images. They can be had at will by anyone if they close their eyes and recall any scene they have seen before. The only problem was that I had never seen angels before. I am sure the Holy Spirit allowed me to see them to give me assurance that they were protecting me.

The one thing that Rick added to my life along with the experiences that we had at his place in El Paso was the respect he had for my relationship with the Lord. He recognized that I loved the Lord as much as he did and he respected me for that. We had many conversations about Jesus and our relationship with him. In all of these experiences we established a bond of love.

We had other worldly interests too. Rick loved country music and so did I. He also liked jack rabbit hunting with dogs. His ranch was overrun with jack rabbits so he kept three dogs. He had a Lab that he kept with him most of the time, a half coonhound and greyhound and another dog of assorted parentage that loved to chase rabbits. We would take a pickup and go out into the desert at night and when we caught a jack in our lights we would turn the dogs loose and let them run the rabbits down. The dogs ran by sight and not by smell so they often lost them. Rick enjoyed this sport. He was no Francis of Assisi although he did stop hunting after he was criticized by some of his congregation.

Lastly, Rick was about as prolife as one can get. He went to jail for his beliefs on

several occasions. One thing he did that I admired was that he would take a group of prayer warriors and go to abortion clinics and sit outside in their truck or van and pray. He also did this when they wanted to get a Christian elected mayor of Juarez. They sat in front of city hall and prayed for a whole day. He also took on heavy metal rock concerts in the local Colosseum. They rented a room in the basement and prayed for the concerts to be thwarted. They were. Rick was a great believer in prayer.

There were so many miracles that occurred in his ministry that I do not remember the details, but I know that they happened.

It is not surprising then that when I was notified of his death I felt terribly saddened. There was a sense of loss that led me to tears as I prayed and released him to the Lord. As I prayed, memories of Rick flooded my mind. I remembered the jeans and flannel shirts he wore that came from the clothing bank. I remembered also his trademark high top canvas basketball shoes that stuck out from under his cassock when he celebrated mass. I remembered the cakes of soy and other vegetables that he carried with him on his trips. He always ate a diet that identified him with the poor. Fine food was not to be found in his diet. Rick so identified with the poor that he could not bear the thought of eating rich food.

I cite all these memories for you to illustrate how we install people in our minds. Rick had become a part of me during the years that I knew him. This is what has

been called a psychospiritual installation that makes them part of us. We do not have to see them very often, but we do want to see them. As long as they are alive we carry them with us, and in some ways we live our lives for them. When we are Christians we have the bond of love that comes from the Lord and we treasure them as friends all the more. I am sure that is why I loved Rick so. We were one in the Spirit.

When a close friend dies we have to uninstall them. This takes time, but when they are Christians it makes it easier. We know that we will be reunited with them in eternity so we have to commit them to the Lord and release them temporarily until we rejoin them. Time and space will not separate us again.

My relationship with Rick was as a friend. This installation is partial. Our installation with other loved ones is different. When we are born we are completely installed in the first few weeks in our parents. This is a dependent installation since we are helpless and dependent on them. It is God's intent that we are born into their love, and, therefore, have to bond to them to return that love. We have a radical need for that love, just as we have a radical need for friends. Our installation with our children has to end though. We must release them as they separate and individuate after puberty. Only when they have done that can they install their mates in themselves.

When we fall in love we go through the process of installing our mate. This should be a complete installation and they truly become one with us. When this installation is complete we can marry. As we grow in our marriage they become even more a part of us. This is why the most stressful thing that can happen to us is the death of our mate. The second most is a divorce. In both cases we have to grieve to uninstall them. Unfortunately it is most difficult in divorce, for there is no closure to the relationship. It takes a lot of work to end a marriage with a divorce, especially if the couple has children. When a marriage ends by divorce or death people have to grieve and release their loved one to God's mercy.

Grief is a sorrow that comes from loss. We are deprived of the love of the person who died. We are deprived of their physical presence, as well as their intellectual and emotional presence. Still they are part of us so we have to let them go. Being a believer makes it a lot easier.

To initiate grief we have to have a funeral or memorial service. This is a formal way of beginning the process by committing the person to the Lord. The next thing that has to be done is get rid of their belongings. One cannot leave the house as if the loved one is still there. It must be changed for it brings back too many memories.

Earlier I mentioned Ken McAll. Ken was another godly man. His experiences in North China before WWII revealed God's protection in ways that most of us could never have experienced. Ken survived floods, firing squads, attacks by the Japanese army, the activities of Mao Tze Dong's guerillas, and four years in a

Japanese prison camp. In the camp miracles began to occur when he prayed for the sick and continued after he returned to England. Through all his hardships and trials, Ken loved the Lord, and it showed in his life. In spite of the treatment he received from the Chinese communists and the Japanese military, he never developed resentment or hate. In spite of his achievements, he always retained his humility. It was hard not to love Ken.

When he died I grieved. I still miss him, but know that like Rick, I will be reunited with him in eternity.

