

Is it possible to live with a hole in your heart?

Thanks to the miracle of modern medicine, most surgeons would say that depending on the severity of the hole, surgery—albeit extensive and risky—can repair it.

Why live with a hole if you don't have to?

But some holes can't be fixed.

Some fissures—the kinds brought about by unrelenting grief, mental and physical illness, and the ending of a life you once knew—defy the adeptness of even the most talented of surgeons.

How then do you live?

*Can you you live?*

That's the question staring Job in the face this morning. It's the question that you have faced or will face when life as you have known goes up in flames and leaves only ashes in its wake.

We met Job three weeks ago in the land of plenty and ease, but it wasn't long before we found him undone by the loss of his family, his home, and his vocation. As we considered our own losses alongside his—especially our griefs of the last 18 months—we honored the need and importance for lamenting, truth-telling, and tending to ourselves and others with compassion. We called out the fallacy of certainty for what it is—sin—and named a more faithful truth about life:

not everything happens for a reason;

accidents happen;

heartache and disappointment are no respecter of age, intelligence, income, education, or lot in life.

At the same time, we held in tension the truth that beauty and mercy, grace and hope, often emerge when we least expect it—like in K-mart parking lots with friends who will wait and wait...with you, or with cashiers who will nod and smile with kindness when you can't respond to the question of "how are you?" without tears welling in your eyes.

Conversely, we also rolled our eyes at the hollow piety and judgmental advice of Job's friends...and then we wrestled with our own inclination to assign blame and cause because of *our* need for control and authority.

And at long last, God finally spoke. Alongside God's sweeping tour of the cosmos we reckoned with the notion that God's so-called answers are not really answers. They are often more like invitations. In this case, God invited Job—and invites us—to make space for beauty amidst the pain so that we remember that although grief and heartache are real and all-consuming at times, they are not the sum total of our purpose. From there, we discovered that our relationship with God is not something to which we arrive but rather something that is ever evolving as we discover that God is much bigger, more surprising, and also so much more faithful that our human minds can fathom, which is where we meet Job: *"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you...and I relent and find comfort in dust and ashes."* Job now recognizes that the God whom he thought he knew, the one whom he thought was distant and indifferent, is actually much nearer than he ever had imagined, even in his sorrow. Job's realization that God and Job's relationship to God live outside the realm of mere words become his foundation for hope and his pathway for life.

And, it can be ours, too.

Of course, that doesn't make life any less scary. Knowing what we now know and having seen what we have seen, this can be the hardest step to take. Even now, I can't help but wonder if the "what ifs" that sometimes befall us befell Job, too?

*What if I fall into that rabbit hole once more?*

*What if my heart breaks again?*

*What if I fail again?*

*What if they let me down again.*

Standing in this place is akin to standing in a doorway. We can return to what was but only at the expense of what lay beyond the horizon. Despite conventional wisdom, Job decides to keep going, to see if there is more to God. And he doesn't do so after he experiences the fullness of new life. He decides to walk the path of life not knowing what lay ahead.

That is trust.

That is faith.

That is courage.

It's not fail-proof.

It's not certainty.

It's not control.

It won't sell a *New York Times* bestseller.

But it is the path to peace and freedom.

It's putting one grace-filled, grace-relying foot in front of the other, even when you're not sure what to make of the moment.

Years ago, when I lived in Williamsburg, I found myself grappling with this same sense of dislocation. I was knee-deep into dissertation research when I stumbled across a collection of photos that flooded my heart and mind with memories—memories that made me alternately smile with joy and cry with indescribable longing and heartache. I felt the walls of my dining room office closing in on me, so I decided to flee outside. It had just rained, the ground was wet, the air smelled of fall's arrival, and sometimes you have to immerse yourself in the mystery of creation when nothing makes sense.

As I walked the tree-lined streets of my neighborhood trying to make sense of my dis-ease,

I thought about how my friends and family members were fairsing in the remnants of Hurricane Ike, which had just swept through southeast Texas.

I thought about a friend who had died much too young, and left her parents forever grieving for their only child...

I thought about another friend who lost both her grandparents—the ones who raised her—within months of each other...

I thought about the kiddos who lost parents on 9/11, and the mothers and dads who lost children in Katrina...

And today, I think about all of you. The stories you have shared, the ones I have shared alongside with you, and the ones only you know.

I believe now as I did that fall day that we all have holes in our heart.

At times we'd do anything to fill them back in...until one day, we realize that life is indeed a gift...and our story, though shattered, is not finished. And when we're ready, we honor that. *When we're ready.*

But like I said, fear and doubt and grief and sorrow and pain have a mind of their own. One sentence in a book or song on the radio can stop you in your tracks and your entire day changes. Inexplicably, you can taste and feel the weather on your skin and you know you are in the midst of God's creation, but you also know that something feels strangely amiss and absent and you want to retreat into a cocoon.

Moments later though, you find yourself inexplicably rejoicing that despite all that life has wrought, you are still living your own life well.

But before you can even take that in, you think of those in the throes of sorrow and you know all you can do is walk beside them because they need to be where they are at even if you'd rather take it away.

So you walk, or do whatever it is you do.

You feel it all.

*You feel it all.*

But then you inhale and exhale a big breath, lift your head to sky or down on your knees, and the truth becomes clear: **your heart may have a gaping hole, but it hasn't stopped beating.**

*That's* the aching beauty of Job's story. Of your story. Of God's amazing story. It's not over. God is always making things new. For as Christians we are not in the fixing business. We are in the resurrection business, which only comes after death, in the ashes, when all seems hopeless.

Yes, we can live forever afraid waiting for the next blow. But [as writer Jessica Griffith muses], "what if knowing [you] can and do and will survive means [you] can afford to be gentler, more tender? What if it means [you] can risk heartbreak and shipwreck? That you can live and love with abandon?"<sup>1</sup>

*What if?*

This may be the end of our trip with Job, but it's the never the end for you. For not even death nor life, nor angels nor demons, nor the present nor the future, nor height nor depth nor anything in all of creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus—the Love that led God's heart to the cross and then raised him from the dead with his scars still marking his side—scars that remind us that power is found in weakness,

in weakness,  
in weakness,  
in weakness,

not in strength.

So, back to original question: is it possible to live with a hole in your heart? Is it even worth it?

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Mesman Griffith, "Heartbreak and Shipwreck," *Mudroom*, October 13, 2015, <http://mudroomblog.com/heartbreak-and-shipwreck/>.

My friends, guess what?

It may not be pretty. It's certainly not glamorous.

But, by God, look at you.

*Look at you!*

You're already doing it.

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