



# A Grace Disguised

Jerry Sittser

This is a brief summary of the book, “A Grace Disguised” written by Jerry Sittser.

The story is deeply rooted in the sudden loss of three of the author’s relatives, his mother, his wife and his young daughter. It is not, however, just a story about pity and one man’s sorrow. It is a profound reflection on the ubiquitous nature of loss and sorrow and the grace, generated during such times, to drive transformation.

Reading this powerful book was very difficult for me. Its emotive nature and mentally stimulating images left me weeping as I tried desperately to move past the first chapter.

The title is fitting “A Grace Disguised”. The story reveals the hurt, pain and resultant growth experienced by the author after the loss of his relatives through a vehicular crash.

As is noted by the author, we all face loss of one kind or another. The question is asked, are we going to allow ourselves to be consumed by that loss, never to appreciate the blessing of life again? He offers a more positive option. Through his experience, the author has come to the realization that the impact of loss of any kind can be used as a launch pad to our inner transformation.

A Grace Disguised is a valuable resource for any one of us because we are all either dealing with a current loss, have previously experienced loss or will soon be

facing some type of loss. There are many nuggets of advice and comfort offered to help cope and use grief as a means of accessing grace.

A poignant line early in the book refers to the tendency of all of us to quantify and compare suffering and loss. Instead, the author proffers that “loss is loss”. In other words, there ought to be no comparison of your loss with another’s. Each type of loss is “devastating, cumulative and irreversible.”

Pulling apart a variety of situations, Jerry Sittser examines loss of loved ones through death or divorce, loss of health and loss of job. The sudden and definitive nature of his loss, while difficult beyond description, meant that he was left in a position of having to chart out a course to move forward for himself, his surviving children and the rest of his social network. This is contrasted with having to deal with a poor health diagnosis which presents a different challenge. In such a case, he portends, that moving forward becomes almost futile as there is a dark cloud continuously hanging overhead.

The point he is making is that all loss is painful. No one can experience the same intensity or nature of feeling that anyone else does. The author advises that, when faced with adversity, we need to try to gain meaning from it and to try to grow from it.

In his meditation on the topic, Jerry found that he was left with two choices: to run from the pain or to stay in the pain. He chose to stay in the pain, experiencing it to the fullest, and allowing it to transform him. By doing so he learnt that the actual experience of loss is not the defining moment in one’s life.

Instead he came to the realization that the defining moments in our lives are our responses to whatever loss we may experience. This revelation helped him to experience life more fully, more completely and gave more meaning to simple things that are normally taken for granted.

Another powerful yet somewhat contradicting point emerges as we delve deeper into Jerry’s journey. He contends that “recovery is a misleading and empty expectation.” His premise is that “catastrophic loss by definition precludes recovery”. Such loss may transform or destroy but it guarantees that you are never the same again. His profound analysis of his personal loss brought him to the

conclusion that some element of sorrow never leaves the mourner; there is a kind of beauty in this sorrow that becomes noble and gracious.

According to Jerry in *A Grace Disguised*, suffering strips away the frivolities of life, leaving the sufferer more acutely aware of what truly counts. It makes us more compassionate and empathetic and more in tune with the goodness around us. As he offers, gifts of grace always come our way. We must be ready to see them and willing to accept them. We must not become bitter but instead choose to hold on to the belief that life can still be good...different but good.

The author, in his meditations, realized that loss of self is closely linked with circumstances of extreme loss. He refers to the different ways in which we define self. For example, self as a professional is lost with the loss of a job; self as a spouse comes with the loss of a spouse through death or divorce; self as a health or fitness buff comes with a poor health diagnosis; and finally, “amputation of the self we once were or wanted to be, the self we can no longer be or become” occurs with direct, extreme, personal injury.

It is further discussed that such loss of self will precipitate the problem of redefining who you are. A problem that he says can only be overcome by deliberately taking steps to develop new aspects of your character, your personality, your identity.

With the twists and turns of recovery, Jerry delves into the aspect of faith. He discusses how he doubted God and His existence. He leads us through his testing of faith to show how he eventually learnt to trust in God.

Perhaps one of his most difficult points to swallow for most of us would be the point of forgiveness. Jerry’s take on this is that forgiveness is central to healing because it involves being able to forgive the one who could be your greatest enemy: you. In his quiet moments of reflection, he was able to recognize that he blamed himself, so many times, in so many ways, for the apparently random act that almost destroyed him.

The very random nature of the accident that claimed the lives of his loved ones, suggests that we ought to be living in fear of random negativity at all times. Instead he suggests that our resiliency stems from our choice of believing that there is

some greater purpose; that our loss was designed into our life by God as part of a bigger picture, the likes of which we may not know.

He leaves us with some stimulating thoughts. For instance, instead of asking, “Why me?” he suggests asking, “Why not me?” He expounds on the value of letting go of the past and holding on to God, knowing that one day we will be at peace.

A Grace Disguised ends on a beautifully positive note: “I happen to be enjoying a period of equilibrium and peace.” Jerry senses that “the story God has begun to write he will finish. That story will be good. The accident remains now, as it always has been, a horrible experience that did great damage to us and to so many others. It was and will remain a very bad chapter. But the whole of my life is becoming what appears to be a very good book.”

I wipe my final tears for Jerry’s story as I complete this piece on Jerry Sittser’s book, A Grace Disguised.

If you can identify with Jerry’s feeling of loss and grief, please reach out to us to help you find someone in your area to help you along this journey.

by Caron Asgarali  
for Victim Support Foundation

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